the heart wants what it wants

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Daniel LaRusso, Johnny Lawrence, Dutch (Karate Kid), Tommy (Karate Kid), Jimmy (Karate Kid), Bobby Brown (Karate Kid), Ali Mills (Karate Kid), Susan (Karate Kid), John Kreese, also mentions of sid and johnny's mom

Additional Tags:
Time Loop, Angst, Fluff, Fluff and Angst, Canon-Typical Violence, Blood and Violence, Drinking, Panic Attacks, Slow Burn, Beaches, background alisusan, honestly everyone's done with johnny's stupid pining throughout, and they all tell him, Choking, Pining, Mutual Pining, John Kreese Being an Asshole, Self-Harm, Getting Together, Angst with a Happy Ending, Rivals to Lovers, Enemies to Lovers, were they ever really enemies?? mutual obsession is kinda gay ngl, author talks shit about mercedes but also do I know much about cars? no, please read additional warnings in the notes!!, Vomiting

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by transvalkilmer

Summary

“I almost kissed LaRusso,” Johnny blurts, because he doesn’t have much of a filter usually but especially when he’s drunk.

“What?” Ali asks loudly, voice almost a screech. She whips her head around to look at Johnny, eyes wide. “Johnny, what?"

or

Johnny lives through the day of the tournament over and over and over again.

Notes

As a prior warning: There is graphic depictions of choking, thoughts during panic attacks, violence, heavy drinking, self harm, references to alcoholism, and mentions of the abuse Johnny's faced at the hands of Kreese and Sid.

Stay safe!!

As another thing: If some of the dialogue during the canon events is wrong, I was going primarily based off captions for some of it, so I apologize!

See the end of the work for more notes

Johnny wakes up the day of the tournament shivering because he left his stupid window open last night and the sound of Sid's annoying, gruff voice arguing with someone.

Johnny slams his fist into the pillow beside him, groaning.

He would love to not hear Sid's stupid fucking voice for once in the morning, but apparently he's not that lucky. Not like he's ever been fucking lucky.

(Except for today. Maybe he'll finally get lucky today.

Not that he needs luck to kick Daniel LaRusso's ass. He's been doing that since the fucker showed up on the beach one day and decided he could just get involved in something that had nothing to do with him.

Today won't be different. Today he'll kick LaRusso's ass again. Today he's going to be a three time tournament champ.)

Johnny shuts his window, wrinkling his nose at the sight of Sid arguing with some contractor guy outside. Jesus, what an asshole. Guy's just trying to do his job.

He slips on his gi, pausing as he passes the mirror.

He's always thought the tournament gis were cooler than the regular gis they wore, but they're always a shock to see anyways.

It makes him feel badass. Like he can defeat any opponent with the black and yellow fabric on.

He runs his fingers over the yellow patch on his chest.

The Way of the Fist. The only way really in Johnny's opinion.

Johnny passes by Sid's bedroom on his way downstairs, the door open a crack to reveal his mother's slumped figure.

There's a wine glass on the nightstand. The position she's in looks uncomfortable.

Johnny wants to help her into a more comfortable position, but he should get going. He doesn't want to get caught in Sid's room and have the old man go on a rampage.

He'd be late then and Sensei Kreese would really kick his ass for that.

So, he makes his way downstairs and shoves on his Chucks before dashing out to the Avanti.

Sid makes some comment at him that he ignores, speeding off towards the tournament location.

Sid's not going to ruin this day for him. He has a trophy to bring home.

☆

Bobby's waiting for him outside when he gets there.

"About time, man," Bobby says, but there's no heat in it and he's smiling.

Johnny grins back at him, pulling him into a hug and slapping him on the back.

"What, they sent you to welcome the future champ?" Johnny teases. “I’m honored, Bobby.”

Bobby just rolls his eyes, punching Johnny in the arm hard enough to hurt but not hard enough to do any real damage.

(Bobby’s always been more willing to be merciful than the rest of them. His only real weakness as a fighter.)

“No, the rest of them didn’t want to wait on your prima donna ass,” Bobby tells him good naturedly, falling into step beside him as they enter the building. “Sensei Kreese has us signed in. Including you, *future champ* .”

Johnny feels his ears flush, ignoring the embarrassment bubbling up in him if simply for the fact that he’s said worse.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Johnny mumbles, cuffing Bobby on the back of the head.

Bobby just elbows him back.

(Bobby’s always been kind of like a brother to him.

Before Dutch and Jimmy and Tommy, there was Bobby. A small, sweet kid who always invited Johnny everywhere with him.

He’d invite Johnny over when he knew Sid was being a dick and he’d

drive him around before Johnny got his license. He's always been close with Bobby.

Bobby's easy to be around.)

"I'm gonna catch up with Jimmy real quick. He's been trying to get me to listen to some new song for ages and apparently he brought his walkman with him," Bobby tells him, giving him another elbow to the side before running to catch up with Jimmy.

It's strange watching his friends be all happy and jokey when part of Johnny feels like he's going off to battle.

Karate is usually a bit more serious to Johnny than it is to everyone else though.

He imagines he might do karate professionally after high school, competing nationally or even internationally.

Sure, he could go to UCLA like Ali or take a gap year like Tommy, but his passion lies in karate. He knows that's what he wants to do for the rest of his life.

Yeah, he knows it's kind of unrealistic, but he'd rather become a worldwide karate champion than go to college on Sid's dime. He'd probably have to major in something Sid wanted him to then. Something like business or engineering or how to be an old decrepit asshole.

Karate is where it's at for Johnny. This is it for him.

Johnny blinks a little as he hears Dutch's voice inside the locker room. Jesus, how long did he zone out for?

"Well, well, well, look who we have here, fellows," Dutch says, echoing in the small space. "Our little friend Danielle. Hello, Danielle. What's the matter? Mommy not here to dress you?"

(Johnny doesn't talk about the comments they make about LaRusso's mom. If they knew how much Johnny cared for his own mom, how fiercely he loved her…well, maybe he wouldn't be in this group anymore either.

Sure, they're friends, but they know how much of a dog-eat-dog world it is out there. You have to leave the weak ones behind and that means people who are weak enough to let themselves love.)

Johnny moves into the enclosed space, feeling like a lion circling its prey.

LaRusso doesn't respond, because of course he doesn't. He probably thinks he's too good to get into it before the tournament. Asshole.

"Hey, I'm talkin' to you, punk!" Dutch growls, shoving Daniel.

Oh, Johnny can't wait to watch this.

Dutch jumps across from him, begging for a fight. He's been itching for a fight ever since Sensei Kreese told them to leave LaRusso alone until the tournament. Frankly, Johnny would love to see LaRusso get what's coming to him, but it's probably some kind of penalty if they kick the kid's ass before the tournament. Johnny doesn't want to deal with that.

He'll let Dutch deal with it though.

"Come on, come on, make a move!" Dutch roars, assuming a fighting stance.

LaRusso assumes one across from him and Johnny can tell how scared he is. His big Bambi eyes betray him, wide and fearful. His lips slack, like he's about to cry. A deer caught in headlights. A sheep in wolf's clothing.

They don't get far though, some ref clearly having overheard the commotion.

"Hey, hey, save it for the ring. Come on," he says, pushing Dutch away from LaRusso. "All right. Let's go. Come on."

"Points or no points," Dutch says. "You're dead meat."

And LaRusso is still in that fighting position that doesn't look like a real fighting position with that stupid look on his face that looks like he knows he should run but can't make himself.

God, Johnny hates him.

"I said, out!" The ref repeats, watching Dutch closely like he's going to try to attack again. Johnny honestly doesn't blame him. Dutch would probably try again.

Dutch walks backwards, a tiger watching its prey.

"Dead meat!" Dutch warns again, snickering.

And with no mat or official point system, LaRusso looks so fucking vulnerable.

Bobby leaves first, an uncomfortable look on his face like he wants no part in it. Jimmy follows him, murmuring something to Bobby that earns him a playful shove.

Johnny follows after. Sensei Kreese would kill them if he knew they threatened LaRusso before the fight.

Sensei Kreese, for as much as he cares very little about etiquette, cares about his principles a lot.

"Let's go. I think he's gonna cry," Tommy mocks.

And LaRusso had looked like he was going to cry. Like he was gearing up to strike, yes, but also like a dam was going to burst. Johnny knows the feeling all too well, not that he'd admit it.

☆

Johnny's not surprised that it's him and Bobby that make it to the semi-finals, though it is surprising that Tommy and Dutch lost to LaRusso of all people.

But LaRusso'd been just as fast as he looked and knew more than all the ass kicking he got from them during Halloween gave away. Johnny would call it beginner's luck, but he knows better than to say it loud.

(Sensei Kreese had told them many times there is no such thing as luck in a fight.

There are opponents who are bigger than you, stronger than you, who know more than you. But they don't have luck. They have power over you.

"And if they win, it's not luck," Sensei Kreese had said, walking down the rows of students. "It's your failure. A failure of your instincts, a failure to survive, a failure to fight back."

Sensei Kreese had stopped in front of him, glaring down his nose at Johnny.

Johnny squared his stance. This was a test, he knew it was.

“Isn’t that right, Mr. Lawrence?”

As if he ever disagreed with Sensei Kreese.

“Yes, Sensei!”)

Johnny wins his semi-final match.

He fights quickly and efficiently. Strikes first, strikes hard, and has no mercy.

Johnny just hopes that Bobby gives LaRusso the same treatment.

Bobby shakes him around as he congratulates him, wrinkling his gi and yet Johnny doesn’t care at all. It’s nice. Maybe they’ll end up facing off against each other.

It really would be a fight for the ages if he and Bobby faced off against each other. The two top fighters of Cobra Kai and an entire arena of people. It’d be crazy.

“Yeah, man!” Bobby says, beaming up at him. “Seriously, dude, that was awesome. See you in the final, man.”

Johnny grins back at him, getting to pretend for once that there’s no tournament, no arena around him. Maybe in the end it’ll be just like sparring in the dojo.

Bobby stands up to head towards the ring, but Sensei Kreese stops him.

“Bobby,” he says. “I want him out of commission.”

Johnny turns towards Sensei Kreese, blinking. Bobby could totally beat LaRusso without injuring him. He’s one of the best fighters they have.

“But sensei, I can beat this guy,” Bobby tells him, voicing Johnny’s own thoughts aloud.

(Johnny almost wants to side with him, but he knows better.

Listening to Sensei Kreese helps avoid lessons where Johnny wakes up the next day feeling like he’s almost died. Plus, Kreese does everything for a reason. He just wants what’s best for them, right?)

“I don’t want him beaten,” Sensei Kreese tells him like Bobby’s an

idiot for even saying it.

“But I’ll be disqualified!”

Johnny wants to cringe just hearing the argument. Bobby shouldn’t argue with Kreese like this. He’ll probably get kicked out of the dojo if he argues any further.

Bobby’s always been like that though. Pushing when other people pull and arguing when other people won’t. It’s something stupid he’s always done, even when they were kids.

“Out of commission,” Sensei repeats, casual and warning all at once.

Bobby looks away from him, an answer in and of itself.

Despite the way Bobby always voices his opinion, he always relents if only to appease the masses.

Johnny watches the way Sensei watches Bobby on the mat, wondering what he’s thinking. Wondering if this is real life. Wondering if Sensei actually told Bobby to put LaRusso out of commission.

Bobby’s stance betrays nothing of his intentions, looking simply like he’s gearing himself up for a fight. And then he moves, strikes LaRusso right in the side of the knee.

The crowd roars its disapproval, Bobby down on the ground by LaRusso and Johnny can’t hear what he’s saying, but he knows he’s apologizing. Bobby’s too kind for his own good. Johnny would know. The years he spent on Bobby’s floor with Sid’s voice still rattling around his head prove as such.

Daniel cries like a wounded animal, like prey being torn into.

Johnny tries not to let his own stance betray anything, but he can’t stop looking up at Sensei Kreese. How smug he looks.

God, this guy is sick.

Sensei claps and Johnny can’t help but stare, feeling incredulous. Johnny knows he’s not even cheering because he got up. He’s just cheering for a fucking injury. What the fuck.

Johnny wants to throw up. Johnny doesn’t want to be weak.

Sensei looks over at him and Johnny can’t help the way he stiffens.

The way he's been trained to shrink under Sensei Kreese's gaze when he looks like that. So casual and yet so warning, like a cobra waiting to strike.

LaRusso has fifteen minutes to return to the mat.

Johnny hopes he will.

He wants a true fight.

He doesn't say this aloud.

☆

Daniel doesn't show up.

Johnny tries not to feel disappointed, keeping his face neutral as he stands beside Sensei Kreese.

It doesn't even feel good to be a champion for the third time. It feels like everything else in his life. A product of his richness, a product of his connections, a product of something superficial.

He can't help but be a little smug though. It is his win after all. And that little twerp couldn't even come close. He's finally beaten him once and for all.

Johnny blinks as Ali comes back up on stage, whispering to the announcer.

"Daniel LaRusso's gonna fight?" the announcer asks and then, excitedly, "Daniel LaRusso is gonna fight!"

Johnny blinks, turning to look at Kreese and then back down where LaRusso disappeared to.

Scrappy little bastard.

Of fucking course he'd fight even after getting kicked in the knee by Bobby. Even after they knocked him to the ground at the beach, he still got up and punched Johnny. He still came to the tournament after what happened during Halloween and after they drove him off the cliff.

But Daniel LaRusso just doesn't quit, does he? He just gets right back up to get his ass kicked again.

Johnny can appreciate that.

He's going to enjoy taking the fucker down. He's going to do it right.

The announcer keeps talking as Daniel limps over to his sensei and then onto the mat, subtle but still there. Kid still has some fight in him, even after everything.

"Face me, bow," the ref says and Johnny does it mostly out of habit than anything else. "Face off. Bow. Ready?"

Johnny takes a fighting position, putting his fists up.

Strike first, strike hard, no mercy.

"Fight!"

Johnny rushes at him with a kick that LaRusso dodges easily, his kick blocked by LaRusso's arms.

Johnny's not going to give up. He's going to corner him. He's going to make sure LaRusso feels every fucking blow tomorrow.

Johnny kicks and doesn't think fast enough as he settles his stance again, letting out a noise more from the impact of the punch than anything else.

The crowd roars again.

"One point, Daniel!"

Johnny's going to make him pay for that bullshit.

He shoves LaRusso back, feeling the way the anger settles in his gut. He can use that. He can take his anger and make it a fist, make it something that'll have LaRusso regretting even agreeing to be in the tournament.

"Lawrence, return."

Yeah, yeah. He's fucking returning, okay?

"One point, LaRusso!" the ref says again and Johnny doesn't need to hear it a fucking second time, okay?

"You're dead," Johnny growls, because it's true. Because LaRusso's not going to get an easy hit on him a second time. No fucking way.

He can hear the way the crowd yells, the way people shout LaRusso's name. But it doesn't even matter. They'll be cheering for Johnny soon enough.

Johnny puts his fists up again, glaring at LaRusso.

No mercy.

"Fight!" the ref yells.

Johnny doesn't need to be told a second time.

He rushes towards LaRusso again, pushing him to the ground rather quickly. This is it. Practically a free point.

LaRusso puts his leg up to kick and Johnny mentally curses himself for not striking faster as he moves back to avoid getting hit.

It almost feels like a dance with the way they move around each other.

Johnny kicks high and Daniel goes low, swiping his legs out from underneath him and landing a hit on his back. He feels the way his nose crunches against the mat and it's…it's fucking humiliating.

He feels like an ant underneath the magnifying glass of a third grader.

God, his nose fucking hurts. He's definitely bleeding.

He's going to kill LaRusso.

"Point, chop! That's two for LaRusso!" the announcer yells, stupidly obnoxious. Not even Tommy's that obnoxious.

Johnny holds a hand to his nose as he gets up, blinking the tears from the way it stings out of his eyes. Sensei Kreese would probably tell him to quit crying if he saw it.

"Time out! Time out!" the ref calls. "Go to your sensei."

Johnny walks over to Sensei Kreese, letting him take a look at the blood dripping from his nose.

Sensei wipes the blood from his nose with his thumbs and if it feels a little fatherly to Johnny's stupid brain…well, no one has to know.

Johnny wipes the blood from his nose too, doing his best to avoid getting it in his mouth. Blood always tastes so fucking nasty and-

“Sweep the leg,” Sensei says, calm as ever.

Johnny feels his blood run cold.

He searches Sensei’s face, trying to figure out if he’s serious.

If he is, then that means Johnny’s not even going to win this like he wanted to. Like he deserved to. Jesus.

“You have a problem with that?” Sensei says, not a question so much as a threat. As if asking Johnny to go against him.

And Johnny’s stupid brain does have a problem with it. He deserved to win because he was good, not because he was playing dirty.

Johnny tries to summon the courage to say so. To say yes, he does have a problem with it.

But he’s not Bobby. He’s not brave and he’s never been brave.

Plus, he’s not going to disagree with his sensei.

“No, sensei,” Johnny says and he hopes his voice doesn’t sound as soft or scared as he feels.

Sensei stares at him like he can feel Johnny’s moment of hesitation.

“No mercy,” Sensei says.

Johnny knows he’s right.

He can’t help the way his eyes rove over Sensei Kreese’s face as if trying to search for something to tell him that he doesn’t mean it, that he wants Johnny to fight honorably.

But that’s not what he’s been taught. Johnny knows no mercy. Johnny will not show mercy to the enemy. He will not show mercy to Daniel LaRusso of all people.

“That’s two points, LaRusso. Lawrence, nothing,” the ref says when Johnny returns to the mat like they really needed a reminder.

The crowd still has so much hope and energy to it. Of course Daniel’s winning.

Johnny refuses to be nothing anymore.

He gets into a fighting position again.

“Ready, fight!” the ref yells.

Johnny’s already made up his mind. No mercy.

He moves forward quickly and efficiently, sweeping the leg just like Sensei told him to and landing a hit on that exact same leg. He refuses to turn around and look at LaRusso, to acknowledge him.

“All right! All right, Johnny!” he hears Tommy yell and…he doesn’t even know. The encouragement feels good, but the way he’s earning it feels…strange.

God, what is he thinking? He doesn’t need to fucking think. He needs to fight.

He sees Sensei’s approval and some sick part of him swells up with pride. He’s making his sensei happy, which is all that matters anyways. Who gives a shit how he earns this win.

“One point, Lawrence. 2-1, LaRusso,” the announcer says in the midst of the booing.

That’ll shut that stupid announcer up from raving about LaRusso. Once Johnny wins this thing, he can take yet another trophy home and put it up on his shelf so his mom can be proud. So Sensei Kreese can be proud.

Who cares what the crowd thinks?

(Some part of him knows he just wants this over with. That he just wants to end it. Not like that, but…he wants it over with. And if the fastest way is to injure LaRusso more, then who gives a shit.)

LaRusso gets back up again like the scrappy motherfucker he is, taking his spot across from Johnny and settling himself into a fighting position. He looks less focused though, like the pain’s getting to him.

Johnny can’t help but think that’s good. Maybe LaRusso will just concede.

(He still wouldn’t have earned it, but it’s better than this stupid, strange feeling in his chest.)

“Ready? Fight!” the ref yells.

Johnny rushes at him again, using his legs more than he had in the beginning. He’s going to get this point. He’s going to be the one who ends up victorious.

He puts a bit more weight into his punches, using his size to his advantage as LaRusso falls to the ground. He grabs his leg, pushing him to the ground and almost getting off balance himself.

Shit, he needs to focus. No mercy. Sweep the leg.

Daniel rolls away from him like a bug trying to escape its inevitable fight and Johnny lands a kick to his side, the one he knows was injured earlier.

“Kick to the side. One point, Lawrence. 2-2.”

He just needs one more point to end this and he’s going to. He will get that trophy. He’ll bring it to the boys and they’ll be so excited for him, just like last year and the year before that. Sensei’s going to be proud of him. His mom’s going to be proud of him.

And more than that, Daniel LaRusso will stop being a thorn in his fucking side. He won’t get in the way of him turning his senior year around, of him getting the perfect girl, of him being a worldwide karate champion after high school.

He fucking won’t once Johnny wins this.

“Ready? Hai!”

Johnny’s not going to let him have this after everything else he’s taken from Johnny.

He lets LaRusso come at him this time, dodging the short jabs that come at him. Seriously, how weak is he?

Johnny kicks toward him, LaRusso dodging them but still managing to drive himself out of bounds. Good. This’ll be over soon.

“Out of bounds, come on back in,” the ref tells a struggling LaRusso.

LaRusso limps and yet he still comes back to the mat.

What is with this kid? Is he seriously just a glutton for punishment?

(Johnny can't help the dim light of respect he feels for this kid though. The way he gets back up over and over and over again no matter how many times he's knocked down. The way he just doesn't give up.)

Johnny sweeps the leg again, watching the way LaRusso gets back up again. He's just asking for another injury at this point.

He grunts as Daniel pushes him to the ground, reaching out to hit him in the back of the leg.

No mercy.

Sweep the leg.

No mercy.

Sweep the leg.

His vision tunnels to only LaRusso and his leg and the quickest way to end this fight.

Johnny pushes himself back to his feet.

He's going to win this. He's not going to be knocked down. He's not going to let LaRusso get one over him.

He lands a punch square on LaRusso's face before backing up. He knows it probably didn't count. Stupid tournament rules and all that.

LaRusso still gets back up though.

Johnny doesn't know whether to feel impressed or simply pissed off. He's just trying to end this, can't LaRusso see that? Why does he have to make it so fucking difficult to do one simple thing?

"Whoever wins the next point will be our new champion," the announcer calls out.

Johnny knows it has to be him. If for no other reason than he has to be the one to end this stupid thing between them. It has to be him. He doesn't know why that's even important right now, but it has to be him.

"No point!" the ref calls out like the crowd wouldn't have booed their heads off if Johnny had actually gotten the point.

LaRusso comes at him again.

This has to fucking end.

Johnny grabs hold of LaRusso's leg when he kicks, bringing his elbow down on the bad knee.

Concede, he thinks almost desperately, *fucking concede*.

LaRusso rolls away in agony.

Less like a gazelle getting its leg torn apart this time and more human. Like rolling across the mat will take him further from the pain.

The crowd boos.

"It's over, Johnny! Yeah, you did it!" Tommy cheers.

None of it feels good.

Who gives a shit how he feels though? He has a fucking fight to finish.

"Are you sure you're okay? Can you go on?" the ref asks as he helps that stupid, scrappy kid from Jersey to his feet.

Johnny begrudgingly respects the little twerp for getting back to his feet. He's going to make him regret it.

"Get him a body bag! Yeah!" Tommy yells from the sidelines.

Johnny does his best not to cringe.

LaRusso's not going to actually need a body bag at the end of this, but it's probably just going to keep going like this. Because LaRusso doesn't ever fucking give up. Ever. Even when he should.

"Warning for illegal contact to the knee," the ref tells him.

Yeah, yeah. He fucking knows, alright?

He can hear Tommy yelling from the sidelines again. Something about no mercy, something about finishing him. And Johnny fucking plans on it, because there's no way LaRusso survives another hit to his injured knee.

LaRusso moves his arms up, leg coming up in some weird fucking pose. Kind of like those paper cranes Jessica likes to make and leave in Tommy's locker.

Johnny doesn't know what the fuck kind of pose that is, but he knows he's going to finish this fight right now. This is it. It's over for LaRusso.

"Finish him!" Sensei yells.

As if Johnny has any other choice.

"Fight!"

Johnny charges.

LaRusso kicks him in the jaw.

He falls to the ground, pain rocketing through his face as he crawls away. He can hear the crowd cheering in the background and he doesn't even care that he lost.

It's over. It's fucking over.

Finally.

Johnny refuses to breathe a sigh of relief.

Johnny watches as LaRusso's friends and family swarm him. How absent his own shoulders are of sympathetic pats. A little part of Johnny feels like the kid deserves it.

He worked hard and he got back up no matter how many times Johnny or any of his friends knocked him down. He deserves the first place trophy.

"The new champion, Daniel LaRusso!"

Johnny hefts the trophy from the announcer's hands.

He'll bring it to LaRusso. A final act of respect.

"You're alright, LaRusso," Johnny tells him, handing it over to the kid. "Good match."

Part of Johnny feels like crying at the loss. By the way his title was so casually ripped from him. But LaRusso should have it. LaRusso fought until the very end.

"Thanks a lot," LaRusso responds, clearly disoriented with the way he's being lifted and the amount of pain he must be in after

everything.

Still, it's the nicest interaction they've had since they've met.

Johnny almost forgets he still has to face Sensei Kreese.

☆

Johnny sits with his second place trophy out in the parking lot, almost feeling numb as he looks at it.

The guys had all been quiet too, like they were steeling themselves to face Sensei as well. Or maybe they were just trying to be sympathetic in their own stupid way.

He hears the sound of Sensei's footsteps against the sidewalk, looking up to face the man in front of him. He can't read the look on his face, but he's not happy.

"You lost," Kreese tells him bluntly like it doesn't sting Johnny's pride. "You're a loser."

Johnny's cheeks burn.

What the hell is Sensei's problem? He did his fucking best. He even did what Sensei told him to do.

And Johnny's never been brave, but he's always been stupid. Maybe that's why he opens his big fat mouth.

"Hey, come on. That's not fair! I got second place!" Johnny argues.

Sensei's face screws up, baring his teeth like an animal getting ready to attack its prey.

"Second place? Second place is no place! You're off the team!"

For the second time that night, Johnny's blood runs cold. Karate is something that keeps him going. Karate is something that's let him be less of a loser. He can't be off the team.

"That sucks. I did my best," Johnny tells him, struggling to find a reason that he shouldn't be off the team. Because Sensei's right. He did lose. And losers aren't welcome in their dojo.

"What did you say?" Sensei yells.

Johnny opens his stupid mouth again, because he's feeling brave right now. Well, not brave, but he can't think of the word.

All he knows is he feels red hot anger flowing through his veins and some sense of helplessness that's reserved for his younger self. Reserved for someone who couldn't use his fists to get what he wants.

"I said I did my best!" Johnny yells back, throwing his fist down at his side with the stupid second place trophy still in hand.

"You're nothing! You lost. You're a loser!"

Johnny glares as harshly as he can. What a fucking asshole. After all he did for this fucking dojo. After all he did for Sensei Kreese.

"No, you're the loser, man."

Because he is. He's just some fucking old guy running a dojo. He's fucking no one.

"Oh, I'm the loser, huh?" Kreese says.

Johnny doesn't feel as sure anymore though. He feels almost like he's getting into a fight with Sid. One that he knows he'll lose but picks despite everything.

"Yeah," he sneers, more cocky and sure than he feels.

In between one moment and the next, Kreese rips the trophy from his hands and breaks it in half.

Johnny…he was going to put that on his shelf. He was going to show his mom if she was even awake. He was going to keep that.

He can't help but feel a bit disappointed as Kreese tosses the remains into the bushes.

"Now who's the loser?" Kreese says like he's less of a loser for breaking a plastic trophy.

Johnny feels it like an epiphany. Like something he should have realized long ago but was too busy focusing on Ali or LaRusso to really register it.

"You know, you're really sick, man," Johnny says incredulously.

What an asshole. Johnny trusted him.

Kreese's face doesn't betray anything as he grabs onto Johnny's shirt and suddenly Johnny can't breathe. He can't breathe, holy fuck.

(He should have just kept his mouth shut, why is he so fucking stupid, Jesus-)

He vaguely registers Bobby and Tommy's yells, but he's too focused on thrashing. Trying to keep himself alive. Oh God he's going to fucking die, isn't he? Kreese is really going to kill him this time.

He feels the way Kreese swings him one way and hits someone and then says, "Don't!" to some other person but it doesn't even fucking matter because Johnny *can't breathe* .

He claws desperately, hearing the way he makes pathetic choking noises. He needs air. He needs someone to get Kreese fucking off of him. He needs air, *he needs air, he needs air* -

"How does second place feel now, huh?" Kreese's taunt breaks through the cacophony in his brain and his voice feels so fucking foggy and that cannot be fucking good and God Bobby please someone fucking help-

He knows people are talking, but he can't fucking hear them and he just wants out. God he'll never fucking do it again he won't even do karate again if someone will just let him have air please fuck please he'll never do it again *please* -

He's sorry, okay? He promises he's so fucking sorry he promises he won't to do it again please he's sorry he's sorry-

He hits weakly at Kreese's shoulder fucking fuck fuck please.

Johnny thinks maybe he's saying something but he doesn't know and he thinks maybe someone else is saying something and Kreese is swinging him in some other direction and he just wants air right now *please* .

His vision is going dark and god he didn't even get to say goodbye to his fucking mom fuck he really fucking hates Kreese and he can't fucking breathe holy fuck-

Someone pries Kreese away from him and Johnny feels himself get shoved to the ground.

Everything hurts as he hits the pavement, coughing and inhaling

lungfuls of fresh fucking air. God, he's never been so fucking happy to breathe air until this very moment. He'll never take this shit for granted ever again.

He feels a pair of hands hauling him up and he doesn't even have the energy to resist, letting himself be carefully guided to sit down. His head fucking hurts and he can barely fucking see. God, he hates Kreese.

A hand wraps itself around his shoulders protectively as glass shatters somewhere in the background. Another hand grabs his elbow as glass shatters again. Johnny doesn't look up from the ground.

"Mercy is for the weak," a voice says. LaRusso's sensei, Johnny's brain registers foggily. "We do not train to be merciful here. A man face you, he is enemy."

Johnny freezes.

He doesn't even know if the guy's being sarcastic or not. If he is, it still stings. Do they really sound like that?

Kreese's knees hit the ground, curled in on himself.

Johnny just wants to go fucking home.

"Johnny," Bobby starts and Johnny doesn't want to fucking hear it right now. He doesn't want to hear Bobby's soft, kind words or have him be all touchy-feely right now.

"Shut up, man," Johnny rasps out, coughing as the words scrape against his throat.

Bobby shoots him a concerned look, but Johnny ignores him as he lets him and Jimmy help him to his feet. He wants to go home and not have to think about this bullshit again.

He rips his arms out of their grasps once he's made it three steps without falling on his face. He doesn't need to be fucking coddled right now.

He's almost an adult. He can handle himself.

☆

Johnny makes it home in one piece, letting the radio blare his Black Sabbath cassette so he doesn't have to think about what happened in

that stupid parking lot.

So he doesn't think about the bruises forming around his neck or the way he can't talk without coughing or the way he knows nobody is going to be fucking awake when he gets home-

He slams his hand into the steering wheel out of frustration. God, he fucking hates Kreese. He's never fucking going back there. Never. Not even to grab any shit he may have left.

Johnny makes his way up the stairs when he gets home, pausing to stop by his mother's now closed door. He knows her and Sid are probably not home. Probably out at some fancy party and all that.

He tries not to think about it. He tries not to think about how the stands were distinctly empty of any familial faces. He tries not to let it crush him after such a long night.

He drags himself to his room, passing out before his head even hits the pillow.

☆

Johnny wakes up the next day to Sid arguing with someone again.

Jesus Christ, really? Is he fucking serious right now?

After the day Johnny had yesterday, all he wants to fucking do is sleep and forget about everything. Maybe he'll head over to Bobby's place and they can take their bikes out.

Or he can go back to sleep. He should probably eat breakfast or something though. Should probably drink water after having his windpipe crushed by Kreese last night.

His throat doesn't hurt anymore though.

Maybe Kreese didn't get him as hard as he thought…?

(It feels impossible with the way he'd spent the drive home coughing like there was no tomorrow.)

He needs to stop thinking about it.

Johnny makes his way downstairs, passing his mother's partially cracked door on the way down.

She's slumped just like yesterday, wine glass on the nightstand again.

So Johnny was right. They were partying yesterday. And missing the fucking tournament.

Not that it mattered in the end anyways. He still lost.

He makes himself a sandwich and a glass of orange juice, deciding maybe it'll be a sit around type day. He deserves it after the tournament.

He's chewing thoughtfully on a piece of ham when Sid barges in through the door. He's red faced and practically foaming at the mouth with how pissed he is, eyes zeroing in on Johnny.

Fuck, Johnny does not want to deal with this right now.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Sid sneers. "I'm not paying for your stupid karate just for you to skip the tournament, boy."

Johnny blinks.

What the fuck is Sid talking about?

"The tournament was yesterday," Johnny says, feeling oddly like he's in the wrong here. "I lost."

"Don't play games with me, boy. I don't care whether or not you're going to lose, it's December 19th. I'm not paying for you to sit around."

Johnny drops his sandwich.

Sid…Sid isn't even clever enough to play games with him like this. Is he…? Is he really?

Fuck.

Johnny doesn't say anything though. He puts the plate in the sink and runs upstairs to grab his gi.

He has to be sure. He can't be reliving this nightmare fucking again. God, he can't.

But he has to be sure.

He speeds off in his Avanti to the tournament location and sure

enough, Bobby is waiting for him outside in his gi.

"About time, man," Bobby says just like yesterday. His face screws up a little as he sees Johnny. "Hey, man, you okay?"

Johnny knows he's probably making some stupid face, so he does his best to form it into something neutral.

"Yeah, yeah, fine," Johnny replies, not feeling all there. "I'm great, man."

Bobby nods at him, seeming a bit unsure. But he just nods, letting a wild grin cross his face.

"Of course you are, man. You're going to be a three time champ today."

Johnny's going to throw up.

"Yeah," he replies, swallowing. "Hey, let's go find the guys."

Johnny walks inside the building with Bobby, feeling so fucking stiff. His stomach is in knots and God, he's really here again, isn't he?

He really doesn't feel super hot. Not after knowing how it ends.

He claps Bobby on the shoulder, knowing the grin he gives is shaky.

"I need to go talk to Sensei, but I'll meet up with you in a bit," Johnny tells him.

Bobby blinks up at him, brows furrowing in concern. Bobby's too fucking kind. More so than Johnny deserves.

"You sure you're okay, man? You know you can talk to me," Bobby says, looking at him so fucking earnestly.

Johnny wishes Bobby didn't have these big puppy dog eyes that made him want to tell Bobby everything. But this is too big.

"Yeah, trust me. Just gotta ask him something," Johnny replies softer than he means to and takes off before Bobby can ask questions.

He knows it looks suspicious when he jogs past Kreese to the locker room. He can't bring himself to care as he shoves himself into a stall and heaves into the toilet before he can even close the door.

Johnny tries not to focus on anything other than the tile digging into his fucking knees and the way his hands clench the fucking seat.

Why? Why did he have to relive this stupid fucking day? What had he done to deserve this?

Was it because of the way he fought? He was just listening to Kreese. It wasn't him.

He reaches up to weakly grab the handle and flush the toilet, sitting back against the wall of the stall.

Jesus.

He rests his forehead against his arms with a sigh.

At least maybe he can win the tournament this time.

"Woah."

Johnny whips around at the sound of someone's voice, coming face-to-face with none other than Daniel LaRusso.

Johnny's cheeks and ears burn with humiliation. God, he can't believe LaRusso has to be the one to see him like this.

He'd rather anyone else see him like this. Even fucking Sid.

"Tournament jitters?" LaRusso teases and his lips curl up into that smug little smirk he wears. Johnny doesn't know if it's supposed to be cruel or not, but he is not in the fucking mood.

"Leave me alone," Johnny tells him, not nearly as biting as he'd like.

LaRusso puts his hands up in a surrendering motion, smirk slipping off his lips like he's starting to realize Johnny's not trying to fuck with him and therefore that must mean something is wrong, and goddammit, Johnny does not need LaRusso's fucking pity.

"Unless you want me to finish the tournament early, LaRusso," Johnny sneers, but he feels sick even threatening it.

(LaRusso's animalistic cries are all too fresh in his mind.)

LaRusso glares at him, crossing his arms over his chest.

Jesus, what is wrong with this kid? Why can't he back down fucking

ever?

"You wouldn't," LaRusso says, way too sure of himself.

Johnny bares his teeth.

What the fuck does LaRusso know?

It doesn't matter that he's right. It matters more that he acts like has the right to assume shit about Johnny.

"What do you know, worm," Johnny snaps back, pushing himself into a sitting position.

He doesn't feel nearly as nauseous anymore, but his stomach turns with anxiety as he climbs back to his feet.

He does his best to tower menacingly, but he knows he looks tired and pale. Not exactly the menacing look he was hoping for.

The glare on LaRusso's face softens once more, stance relaxing into something more casual instead of guarded.

Goddammit.

"I know you just threw up and you should probably sit down right now," LaRusso responds matter-of-factly, raising one of his thick eyebrows at him.

Johnny's face burns again.

He doesn't even need to sit down right now, he's fine.

He opens his mouth to tell LaRusso this when he hears four obnoxious familiar voices.

"Johnny?" Dutch calls out into the mostly empty locker room. "Dude, where the hell did you go?

Johnny feels nothing but panic. Shit, he is not going to get caught like this. The guys would probably make fun of him or have way too many questions.

He pulls LaRusso into the stall and shoves him into the door to close it, reaching under his arm to lock it.

LaRusso blinks up at him with those stupid Bambi eyes, opening and

closing his mouth a few times before smirking.

Oh hell no. LaRusso is not going to get them caught.

He slams a hand over LaRusso's mouth, pressing only a little bit. LaRusso's eyes widen and then settle into a glare. Good. He can cry about it.

Johnny peers over the stall to see if he can see any of the guys. It's not like they would have made it far but still.

He can't see Dutch, but he can hear him still calling Johnny's name throughout the locker room.

Bobby wouldn't snitch on him, but he really doesn't have the best poker face. He'd probably get this dumb, guilty look on his face and get caught by Jimmy since they always hang around each other.

Johnny looks left and then right, just to cover all his bases. Tommy tends to sneak up on-

Oh God something wet is touching his palm-

Johnny does his best to give LaRusso an incredulous look. Is the little bastard seriously fucking licking his palm right now?

Johnny can't see his mouth, but he knows the fucker is smirking.

He's such a fucking bastard.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Johnny whisper yells, lifting his hand slightly to avoid LaRusso's tongue.

LaRusso gives him a pointed look.

"Shut up, LaRusso," Johnny whispers aggressively which earns him another lick to the palm.

Ew. Ew. Fucking ew.

Johnny tries to avoid LaRusso's stupid fucking tongue, ripping his hand away from LaRusso's mouth.

The motherfucker is fucking smirking at him. Smug little asshole. He is not going to win this.

Johnny wipes his hand down the front of LaRusso's gi, earning him a

furious look.

Good. That's what the little fucker gets for licking him. Seriously, fucking ew. Why the hell did he lick his fucking hand in the first place? Gross.

LaRusso opens his stupid mouth again and Johnny is not going to let him give away their hiding place as petty revenge.

He reaches forward, grabbing LaRusso's jaw and squeezing his cheeks. Not hard enough to hurt but hard enough to at least make him uncomfortable.

If he hadn't been living this day for the second time in a row, Johnny might have squeezed hard enough to hurt. But he can't stop remembering LaRusso's animalistic cries.

It makes him want to show mercy. He hates it.

(He's not telling Kreese).

LaRusso bats at Johnny's wrist, trying to stick his tongue out even though his cheeks are being pushed together. He looks so stupid. Johnny could laugh.

Johnny sticks his own tongue out, startling LaRusso if the wide eyes are any indication.

"C'mon guys, he probably left already," Bobby's voice breaks through, Johnny jumping a bit at the sound. He sort of forgot they were here. "Let's get out of here."

Johnny waits until he hears a fourth set of footsteps leave and the door slam shut to let go of LaRusso's face.

LaRusso rubs his jaw, grumbling about who knows what.

He's such a baby. Johnny didn't even grab his jaw that hard.

"Gonna ruin my face," LaRusso mutters. "I swear, Ali won't kiss me if you fuck it up again."

Johnny feels that familiar sick feeling of jealousy stirring in his gut again. Just like that time at the beach. Just like that time at the country club. Just like that time at Golf N' Stuff.

Johnny was even feeling good after fucking around a bit. And LaRusso

just had to ruin it by opening his big fucking mouth.

(He also feels something like guilt deep down inside of him.

He doesn't want to address it. Doesn't want to talk about it. Doesn't want to think of how pathetic and scared LaRusso had sounded when they'd pushed him off the cliff. The ugly bruise around his eye when they'd gotten into that fight on the beach.

He hates feeling guilt. He hates not being able to mow it over with the power of no mercy. He hates it.)

"Shut the hell up, LaRusso," Johnny growls, pushing LaRusso into the stall door. "She doesn't even want to kiss you. Watch it. Once I win this, she'll be begging to have me back."

LaRusso looks up at him, that cocky look in his eye again.

"Yeah, because you're just so great and she clearly wanted you more than me," LaRusso snaps back easily.

Johnny feels burned. Embarrassed. Exposed.

"Shut up, LaRusso," Johnny says.

He shoves LaRusso aside and unlocks the stall door, storming into the arena.

He'll win this time. He'll do it this time.

☆

Bobby won't stop staring at him.

It's almost time for Johnny's semi-final and Bobby won't stop staring at him.

"What," Johnny snaps when he can't take it any longer. "What the fuck do you want, man? You're creeping me out."

It's not true and Bobby knows it, but he's polite enough to not call Johnny out.

"You didn't talk to Kreese," Bobby tells him plainly. "And you weren't out in the arena. Where'd you go?"

Johnny thinks back to LaRusso licking his hand and cringes.

He is not telling Bobby about that.

“Had to piss,” Johnny replies, shrugging.

It’s believable enough. Bobby probably won’t push it.

“Uh huh,” Bobby mumbles, turning his gaze back to the mat. “Hey, you’re up, man. Get out there.”

Johnny stares at Bobby.

Bobby seems…annoyed.

It's weird because Bobby is like a patience fountain. He’s always there for everyone and always letting people talk to him about stuff. Always letting Johnny over when he doesn’t want to deal with Sid.

“Mr. Lawrence.”

Johnny jumps, turning to face Kreese who seems rather unimpressed with him zoning out.

Kreese gives him an assessing look, eyes traveling to the tension in Johnny’s shoulders before they eventually settle on Johnny’s face.

Johnny feels like prey.

“You’re up,” Kreese says casually, directing his attention out at the arena.

Johnny just nods.

☆

He wins his semi-final again because what choice does he have?

He almost feels like an executioner watching Kreese talk to Bobby and just letting Bobby walk away.

He wants it to be different this time. He wants LaRusso to fight him fairly. He wants-

He reaches out and grabs onto the back of Bobby's gi, Kreese’s gaze be damned.

Bobby looks at him with those big blue eyes that kind of remind Johnny of the Pacific ocean out in summer time, eyes that plead for

the other cobras to give people mercy, eyes that are so soft but so sharp when they attack.

Bobby stands there a moment and just looks at Johnny.

Johnny feels like Bobby sees his soul right now. Like somehow Bobby knows this isn't his first time doing this.

He lets go of Bobby's gi and Bobby stands up a little straighter as he heads out onto the mat.

Johnny's going to win it this time. He's going to win it right this time.

☆

Bobby doesn't injure LaRusso this time, but he's still out of the tournament thanks to some quick moves from the shrimpy asshole.

Johnny tries not to look too surprised at that, but it's not like he'd expected it to go that direction when he'd stopped Bobby.

Bobby's their second best fighter. There's no reason to think he'd lose to a kid who barely knows karate.

But Bobby doesn't look upset this time. He looks overjoyed, laughing as he slaps LaRusso on the back at the end of their match.

LaRusso stumbles forward at the force of it, looking surprised as he looks at Bobby.

Johnny's not surprised though. Bobby's the one who always gets hyped up after a match no matter if he wins or loses. Like the match is enough of a thrill that he doesn't need to win to be happy about it.

Kreese cares a lot about a win though.

Johnny feels the man's gaze burn into the side of his face, but he doesn't look at him.

Johnny wanted a fair fight and he's going to get one.

Bobby's still smiling as he heads off the mat, immediately gravitating towards Johnny.

"I was pretty good out there, huh?" Bobby says, bumping his shoulder into Johnny's. "Kid's fast though, seriously."

"Yeah," Johnny mumbles, unsure of how to reply.

Part of him feels relief at the fact that he can win without having to hear LaRusso's cries. The other part of him feels only fear.

Fear for Bobby at how Kreese will react. Fear for himself if he loses the match. Fear, all consuming fear.

Bobby stares him in the eye, blinking. Shit, he's going to ask Johnny if he's okay again, isn't he?

"Bobby," Kreese cuts in, startling both of them. "You're off the team."

He has a calm, measured look on his face like he's daring them to fight back. Daring them to say anything. Daring them to beg for a spot on the team.

Bobby squares his stance, facing Kreese fully. He unwraps the belt carefully from around his waist, a careful and precise motion that's almost mesmerizing to watch.

"I quit anyways," Bobby spits, throwing the belt down in front of him, the careful and precise motion from seconds ago gone as the belt crumples at their feet. "You're messed up. This whole thing is messed up."

Bobby storms out but not without one last look at Johnny. Like he's asking if Johnny'll come with.

But Johnny learned his lesson yesterday. He's not going to be brave this time. Not when he knows it gets him choked out in a parking lot.

Johnny looks away, directing his gaze back towards the mat.

LaRusso catches his eye from across the mat and huh, isn't that something new?

There's no fifteen minutes this time. No wondering if LaRusso's going to return to the mat. No Kreese telling him to sweep the leg.

It's just them and the mat.

☆

Johnny loses.

He doesn't feel happy or sad about it, just…confused.

He did it right this time. He stopped Bobby from injuring LaRusso. He didn't sweep the leg. He struck first. LaRusso didn't even crane kick him this time.

So…why did he lose?

He did everything right.

Was LaRusso really better than him? Quicker than him? Smarter than him?

He sits on the bench of the locker room staring at the second place trophy in his hands.

Was it his fate to lose to Daniel fucking LaRusso?

Johnny looks around the locker room at his teammates. Tommy's talking quietly to Jimmy about something, hand by the side of his mouth to hide what he's saying. Bobby's nowhere to be found.

Dutch stands in the corner of the locker room all curled in on himself, looking about as numb as Johnny feels right now.

Johnny supposes they all lost to LaRusso tonight. Even though they all did it the right way. The fair way.

He's probably taking it the hardest that they lost the All Valley to some shrimp like LaRusso.

He's been dying to beat his ass and doesn't even succeed the one time he gets to.

Johnny gets it. He's lost the All Valley twice now to that asshole. He'll probably lose it at least one more time.

"Hey Dutch," Johnny calls out, watching the way Dutch jumps and turns like a wild animal ready to attack. All from having his name called. Jesus, Johnny knows Kreese had something to do with that.

"What do you want, Johnny?" Dutch asks, sounding tired instead of angry.

"Can you drive me home, man? My brakes are shit right now."

It's a lie, but Johnny's not risking getting choked in the parking lot again.

Dutch hesitates, looking around the locker room as if someone's watching him.

It's a weird look on Dutch who's usually so cocky and confident that it radiates off of him like the sun.

"Shouldn't we wait for Sensei?" Dutch asks, scratching the back of his head.

Johnny feels sick.

If Johnny ever manages to get out of this stupid time loop, he's going to kick Kreese's ass.

"Fuck him, man," Johnny snorts. "He'll just bitch us out anyways."

Dutch nods, looking around nervously again. He grabs his keys from his pocket anyways, shaking them around a bit with a slowly forming grin.

"Let's go then, dude."

☆

Dutch has a nice black 1983 Lamborghini that his parents got him as a birthday gift.

He doesn't let the rest of the guys ride in it since he doesn't want to mess up the interior or something like that. It's not like they'd bring food or anything in there…again.

Dutch picks the music since he says Johnny's music sucks even though they listen to the same things.

As if to prove Johnny's point, he blares his Black Sabbath cassette and shoots Johnny a smug look like he's never heard any of these songs before.

But Johnny can't even bring himself to be mad, snorting at Dutch.

He's relieved the night ended in Dutch's car and not the parking lot.

Johnny glances over at Dutch who's headbanging to the cassette, grinning wildly into the night. He seems better, at least.

Johnny grins silently to himself, looking back at the houses and stores that go by.

Maybe he won't wake up on the tournament day again tomorrow. Maybe he did the right thing after all.

☆

Johnny wakes up to Sid arguing with someone for a third time and screams into his pillow.

☆

By the sixth loop, Johnny's kind of got it down to a science.

If he doesn't go, Sid comes upstairs and bitches at him until he does. If he does go, it doesn't matter if he stops Bobby because he still loses.

As long as he hitches a ride with one of the guys, he can avoid Kreese.

He can't figure out what he's doing wrong. Should he let Bobby injure LaRusso? Should he not? It's not like anything changed.

The morning of the seventh loop, Johnny decides he's going to tell someone. Maybe that'll help.

He meets Bobby outside the tournament like he has seven times before.

"About ti-" Bobby starts, but Johnny refuses to let him finish. He feels like if he doesn't say it now then he won't say it all, and then he's just going to be stuck here over and over until he dies.

"Bobby, we've done this before," Johnny says, the first thing that comes to mind.

Bobby blinks.

"Said hi to each other?" Bobby asks like he's trying to fill in the blank. "Uh, I mean, yeah? We're friends. That's kind of what we do."

Johnny makes a frustrated noise in the back of his throat.

"No, not like that! I mean like-" Shit, how does he even say this? He's never had to fucking do this before. "Like I've lived this day six times already. I wake up and Sid argues with the contractor dude outside. I go to the tournament and you say 'about time, man' and then go talk to Jimmy about some new song he wanted to show you. We go to the locker room and Dutch fucks with LaRusso. We fight and Kreese asks you to injure LaRusso and then I fight LaRusso and I fucking lose."

Jonny sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Fuck, just- forget it. This was stupid.”

He tries to brush past Bobby and head into the building just so he can lose for a seventh fucking time, but he feels Bobby’s slender fingers on his arm stopping him.

“Jesus, just- wait, man. That’s kind of a heavy bomb to drop on a guy, you know,” Bobby says, exasperated.

Johnny feels his cheeks flush, knowing Bobby’s right.

He slowly turns to look at Bobby, trying not to fiddle with the edge of his gi. Bobby looks contemplative, eyes roaming over the pavement in thought.

“C’mon, let’s get out of here, man,” Bobby says, tugging on Johnny’s wrist until they’re standing at the door of Bobby’s car. It’s some 1979 Mercedes model that’s a piece of shit but Bobby loves it.

Johnny’s kind of confused.

“What are we doing?” Johnny asks, staring as Bobby climbs into the driver’s side. “Did you forget something?”

Bobby looks at him, motioning to the wheel like *What does it look like I’m doing?*

Johnny blinks.

“But we’ll miss the tournament.”

Bobby laughs like Johnny just made some hilarious joke.

“Jeez, haven’t you had enough tournament to last a lifetime, dude? Let’s go to a diner or something. C’mon, you’ve seriously never thought about just leaving these past few days?”

Johnny says nothing.

Bobby stares.

“You’ve seriously come to the tournament everyday for the past six days? Dude, why?”

Johnny shrugs, feeling his cheeks heat up in embarrassment.

If it was someone like Tommy or Dutch, Johnny would lie. He'd just make something up or say the first thing that came to mind. He'd say something about Cobra Kai loyalty.

"Thought if I won then I'd be able to break the time loop. It hasn't happened yet though," Johnny mumbles, thoroughly humiliated at the admission. "Plus, I want to beat LaRusso fairly. No injury."

Bobby hums, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel.

Johnny feels relieved and he's not really sure why. Bobby's never really cared about winning and losing like that anyways.

"Well, we'll get you out of here together. C'mon, get in the car."

So, Johnny does.

☆

They drive to some diner near the dojo that they usually go to after training.

Bobby's using the back of a kid's menu and a crayon to write some stuff down, occasionally leaning down to take a sip from his coke.

Johnny stirs the contents of his ice water with the straw the waitress gave him, feeling sort of sick. Fuck, what if Kreese comes looking for him? What if he tries to choke him again? What if-

A bunched up straw wrapper hits him in the chin.

"Earth to Johnny, hello," Bobby says, voice teasing but eyes concerned as they gaze into Johnny's own. "I wrote some stuff down. Look."

Bobby taps the back of his paper with the waxy red crayon.

It's a few stickman drawings of Johnny in his gi with the words *time weird* , *sixth time* , *Johnny lost* , and *going wrong??*

Johnny blinks at it.

"Bobby, what the fuck does any of that mean?" Johnny asks, taking a sip of his water.

Bobby shakes his head like Johnny's the dumb one here for not understanding his thought process.

Bobby points his crayon at one of the stickman drawings.

“This is you. You’re stuck in this loop of reliving the tournament over and over again. And you’ve lost every time to LaRusso, right?”

Johnny nods, not really sure where he’s going with this.

“Maybe it all has to do with LaRusso,” Bobby continues, tapping at another stickman drawing in a gi that’s a little smaller than the rest. "Maybe you have to talk to him or something, dude."

"I have talked to him before," Johnny insists, not caring since it's Bobby.

LaRusso can't be the issue here. It has to be something else. Someone else.

Bobby's eyebrows shoot up, eyes a little wild.

"Yeah? About what?" Bobby prompts, crayon posed above his paper.

Johnny thinks back to LaRusso and him in the stall. Had they talked about anything? Anything meaningful?

LaRusso had definitely licked his fucking hand.

Johnny makes a face.

"He licked me," he says, clenching the hand he'd licked. He can still feel LaRusso's gross fucking tongue.

Bobby writes it down anyway like it's the most important thing he's ever heard.

“Anything else?” Bobby asks.

God, Johnny’s grateful for him. No one else would hear something like my karate rival licked me and take it as well as Bobby did. Tommy would probably have a field day laughing at him.

Johnny shakes his head.

“No? C’mon, you can’t seriously think that LaRusso of all people is linked to this fucked up time thingy.”

Bobby shrugs.

“I don’t know, man. Unless you have anything better?” Bobby says, not a question so much as a challenge. He taps the crayon rhythmically against the paper.

Johnny looks out the diner windows at the cars going up and down the street. They’ll probably be the same ones if Johnny comes back here tomorrow.

“No,” Johnny sighs out, snatching Bobby’s coke and taking a sip of it.

Bobby just watches him with raised eyebrows, not even bothering to try and steal his coke back. Sheesh, Johnny must look real pathetic if Bobby’s not even squawking about it.

“Try talking to him tomorrow,” Bobby says, eyeing his coke critically when Johnny puts it back on the table like Johnny infected it or something. “He’ll probably just think you’re messing with him or something.”

“And what? Tell him I’m stuck in the same day over and over?” Johnny grumbles, stirring his water. A piece of ice flies out onto the table. “He’s too much of an asshole to not make fun of me. I don’t even think he’ll believe me.”

“I don’t know, dude. You don’t have to tell him that. Just like, be his friend or something.”

Johnny snorts.

LaRusso stole his girl and his title. He stole everything Johnny had and he’s probably gonna steal more once Johnny gets out of this stupid fucking time loop.

“Yeah, like we could be friends,” Johnny mumbles. “As if. He’s just some shrimpy dork from Jersey.”

“You were just some shrimpy dork before you joined Cobra Kai,” Bobby points out.

Johnny winces.

Brown 1, Lawrence 0.

“Sorry, dude, but it’s true,” Bobby continues, giving him a sympathetic look. “You two are more alike than you think."

"Yeah, me and him just have so much in common," Johnny snorts,

shaking his head.

"I'm serious, dude. You both like karate, you both have a thing for pretty blondes, and you're both in Mrs. Wilson's class for English."

Johnny opens and closes his mouth.

Huh.

Shit.

Johnny shakes his head.

"That doesn't mean shit. LaRusso's a pussy and newsflash, he stole Ali from me. The English shit barely counts."

"He didn't *steal* anyone from you. You and Ali broke up," Bobby argues, frowning.

It's an argument they've had plenty of times in the last month or so since Bobby thinks Johnny didn't even have another shot with Ali in the first place.

It's stupid and Bobby's wrong. There's no way Ali would choose a dork like LaRusso over him. He's a loser and he's small.

"And newsflash, he beat you at the tournament, apparently even when he was injured. How much of a pussy can he be?" Bobby adds, brows furrowing even further.

Johnny winces.

Brown 2, Lawrence 0.

"Whatever," Johnny grumbles, blowing bubbles into his ice water. Like he needed the reminder of why he's stuck here in the first place.

"Sorry, man, but it's true," Bobby tells him, voice so soft and caring. Johnny can't stand him when he gets like this. "Give him a chance."

Johnny knows if he looked up right now that Bobby would be staring at him with those bright blue eyes that know him way too well.

"Yeah, whatever," he mumbles, sighing into his water.

He feels Bobby's hand on his shoulder, looking up to see how Bobby has leaned himself across the booth just to hold Johnny.

His eyes are so soft and earnest, these big blue puddles that could drown Johnny if they wanted to.

"Thank you," Bobby says.

He's so fucking honest with him. It's so gross. It disgusts Johnny with how loved it makes him feel.

“Whatever,” Johnny mumbles again, pulling away from Bobby’s hand.

Fine, he’ll talk to LaRusso. Whatever will get him out of this thing.

☆

Johnny doesn’t talk to LaRusso until the tenth loop.

He spends loop eight and nine in the diner.

He always orders ice water and pancakes, staying until late and paying with Sid’s credit card. Some lady named Jenny always takes his order and tells him he looks so much like her son. The soup of the day is always chicken noodle.

It’s peaceful compared to the tournament.

Less noise, less Kreese, less karate. It’s just Johnny and the diner.

He knows he has to talk to LaRusso though. He told Bobby he would and even though Bobby’s not here to gaze at him with those sad blue eyes, the image of it is enough.

Johnny knows LaRusso got here after him. It feels like so long ago, but he knows LaRusso got into the locker room and everything after him.

“About time, man,” Bobby says to him as soon as he arrives just like every other time.

Johnny grins at him, slapping a hand on Bobby’s shoulder.

The one thing he’s glad for is that Bobby’s here. That Bobby waits for him. It doesn’t get old even though going through the motions of the tournament does.

“Yeah, yeah,” Johnny says. “Hey, I need to grab something from my car real quick. You can head in though.”

“You sure? I don’t mind waiting, dude,” Bobby tells him, brows furrowing.

Bobby is a saint, but he cannot ruin his own plan by being nice.

“Yeah, I’m sure. C’mon, I overheard Jimmy saying he wanted to show you a new song.”

Bobby nods, still seeming a little unsure. But he relents just like he always does, plastering an all too cocky grin on his face as he slaps Johnny’s arm.

“Yeah, yeah. See you in there, champ.”

Bobby’s jogs backwards into the building, waving the entire way.

Johnny sighs in relief.

He leans against the wall of the tournament building, staring at the crowds of people coming in. He feels like he should be smoking a cigarette or something, but Kreese’ll get on him if he smells like smoke on tournament day.

Johnny curses under his breath. He’s not even competing in the tournament, so why does he care about Kreese? Shit, he needs to get over it.

He eventually spots LaRusso making his way in with his sensei and… Ali. Shit, he’s not going to be able to talk to LaRusso with Ali there. Ali’s going to try and defend LaRusso even though Johnny just wants to talk.

(He’s not really sure what they’re going to talk about, but he’ll figure it out. He’s sure there’s something he could talk about.)

LaRusso’s wearing plaid because of fucking course he is, chatting Ali’s ear off. Doesn’t she ever get sick of his constant chatter? Johnny didn’t talk that much.

Ali spots him almost immediately, curling her body protectively towards LaRusso as they start to reach the entrance.

LaRusso doesn’t even look at him.

Bastard.

“LaRusso,” Johnny calls out once he and his posse are closer.

LaRusso finally looks up, blinking as he sees Johnny. And then the bastard smirks. Jesus, he's not even trying to instigate anything and he already wants to beat the shit out of him.

LaRusso's sensei looks at Johnny. Johnny can't read much in his face, but he sees the way the man moves closer to LaRusso. Johnny owes him his life, so he supposes he can't really be pissed at him.

Ali tugs on LaRusso's arm, but he just brushes her off and swaggers over like he's hot shit. He gets directly into Johnny's space just like he did in front of Mr. Harris, smirking up at him.

LaRusso's got this confident look in his eyes, his stance open without a care in the world. He's just asking to get hit this time.

Johnny clenches his hands at his sides.

"What?" LaRusso says, not a question. He tilts his head, smirk turning into this condescending little smile. "Thought your sensei told you not to lay a finger on me until the tournament. Is that gonna be a problem, Mr. Lawrence?"

A chill shoots up Johnny's spine and suddenly Kreese's arm is around his throat again, choking him in this very parking lot.

Johnny swallows.

He told Bobby he would, so he's going to.

"I need to talk to you," Johnny tells him, but it comes out kind of strangled.

LaRusso frowns.

What, is he upset that Johnny didn't take the bait? Jeez, he's fucking insufferable.

"About what?" LaRusso asks, his tone hostile in a way that puts Johnny on edge too.

"You don't need to talk to him," Ali cuts in, stepping into LaRusso's space. "Save it for the tournament, Johnny."

What the fuck did he do? All he wanted to fucking do was talk.

"Stay out of this," he growls at her. "Just, I need to talk to LaRusso, okay? Alone."

LaRusso's shoulders rise like cats do when they get pissed off.

"Trying to push me off a cliff again, huh? Gonna call your buddies over to kick my ass? What're you playing at, Johnny?"

Jaaahnny . The way he says his name is so fucking annoying.

Ali's looking between LaRusso and Johnny with shock, eyes wide. Oh, so he didn't tell her everything, huh?

Johnny pinches the bridge of his nose, huffing.

This was a stupid idea. Bobby was fucking wrong. This time loop probably has nothing to do with LaRusso and everything with winning. He should never have fucking listened to him.

"What?" LaRusso says again, sounding sharper and almost scared as he gets even closer.

"This was a dumb fucking idea," Johnny says aloud, sighing. "Whatever, I don't give a fuck. Leave me the fuck alone, LaRusso."

"Leave you alone? You're the one who keeps coming after me! You're the one who started this, so finish it! Fucking finish it like you always do!"

Johnny stares at LaRusso who's practically foaming at the mouth, hands clenched by his sides. Animalistic. Predator. Attack.

"Daniel-san," LaRusso's sensei says, tone reprimanding.

LaRusso's shoulders slump, looking away from him. He almost seems…ashamed of his behavior.

Johnny wants to say something, but he can't make his mouth say something coherent.

He makes something of a strangled noise before running off to his car, feeling LaRusso and his posse's fucking eyes on him.

He's going back to the fucking diner.

☆

Johnny stays in the diner until Jenny gently kicks him out.

"Sorry, kid. I'd let you stay if I could," she tells him, an apologetic

smile on her red lips. “You can come back whenever you want, okay?”

She must think he comes from a bad home or something. Jesus, he’s not a fucking charity case. He just likes it here because it’s fucking comfortable and he can’t go back without Sid yelling at him.

He doesn’t say this though.

She kind of reminds him of his mom and he’s not really in that habit of being rude to his mom. He just gives her a polite nod and makes his way out to the Avanti.

Maybe he’ll go back to the tournament tomorrow. It’s worth it to try and win it again. That’s probably how he needs to break this time loop. Not fucking LaRusso.

☆

Johnny loses in the eleventh loop. And the twelfth. And the thirteenth.

Johnny’s so tired.

The fourteenth loop isn’t much better.

It’s a valiant effort on his part, but he still loses to a non-injured LaRusso and watches him raise that stupid trophy above his head.

He gets changed quietly and just sits on the bench.

The locker room is empty. It’s just Johnny and this damn second place trophy.

He’s just going to wait Kreese out tonight. It’s not like Kreese has time to wait around until midnight for Johnny to come out of the locker room.

What the fuck is he doing wrong? It’s like LaRusso recorded his fucking movements before the match. He tries to memorize LaRusso’s movements and he just fucking comes up with new ones like Johnny isn’t fucking trying.

He just keeps fucking losing and nothing is working.

He slams his fist into the bench, wishing the wood wasn’t so fucking strong. Wishing it would crack. Wishing he could feel the way his fist drives into it.

“What’d the bench do to you?”

Johnny jumps at the sound of LaRusso’s voice, whirling around to find the other boy still dressed in his gi. Still with his first place trophy.

Johnny grinds his teeth.

“Get the fuck out of here,” Johnny growls.

“Hey, it’s a free locker room, man. What, you upset someone finally took your title from you? I was thinking I could probably compete again if they have a tournament for people over 18. Think I’d win that one too?”

Stop talking , Johnny begs silently. He clenches his fists at his sides.

“Course you do. I should get going though. Ali and my ma are waiting for me at the restaurant. See you at school tomorrow though. Think people will still respect you with a second place trophy?”

Johnny snaps.

He lunges at LaRusso, slamming him into the lockers. The trophy makes a loud banging noise as it hits the ground, but nobody’s around to hear it.

LaRusso’s eyes widen, his hands coming up to clutch at Johnny’s gi. But he’s smirking fucking again. Jesus Christ, Johnny hates him. Johnny wishes he would fucking lose. Why can’t he fucking lose? What the fuck is Johnny doing wrong?

“What’s wrong? Afraid of the truth?” LaRusso asks condescendingly, smirk absolutely venomous.

Johnny slams LaRusso into the locker again.

“You’re such an asshole,” Johnny hisses. “So fucking full of it. You’re just a dorky ass loser.”

“You’re the asshole here, man. And you got your ass kicked by this dorky ass loser, so what’s that make you?”

Johnny wishes he would just stop fucking talking.

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Upset because it’s true?”

“Just shut up! I can never fucking win against you! Fucking never! You were supposed to get fucking hurt tonight, LaRusso!”

The words ring in the silent locker room.

LaRusso stares at him, the wild look in his eyes gone and replaced with something more fearful.

“What?” he asks, voice so soft. “What the hell does that mean, Johnny?”

Johnny sighs.

Johnny shouldn’t have said anything, but the cat's out of the bag now.

“What do you think it means? Bobby was supposed to take you out of the competition,” Johnny says, looking anywhere but LaRusso’s face. “But I stopped him.”

He can feel LaRusso’s eyes on his face like he’s trying to see if Johnny’s telling the truth. Like he’s trying to figure out if Johnny would ever not hurt him.

“Why?”

Johnny opens and closes his mouth.

It was for himself. So he could get out of this time loop faster. So he could leave.

But LaRusso wouldn’t believe him. And he’d make fun of Johnny, which he doesn’t want to fucking hear right now.

“I don’t know,” Johnny mumbles. “It’d be like fighting a baby deer. It wouldn't be fun."

Not that it had been like fighting a baby deer, but it hadn't been fun. It hadn’t been exciting. It hadn’t been a fight worth fighting.

“Yeah, like fighting is supposed to be fun,” LaRusso spits at him. “What happened to no mercy, huh? You’re saying you joined Cobra Kai because you wanted to have fun?”

Oddly enough, LaRusso has a point. Karate isn’t supposed to be fun. Karate is about showing no mercy and not having fear and…and striking first. Striking hard.

Johnny stares into LaRusso's big brown eyes. How they harden when they glare. How they demand answers from Johnny. How they suck Johnny in.

Was Bobby right?

Is this all tied back to LaRusso?

"Well?" LaRusso demands harshly, yanking on Johnny's gi.

Johnny blinks out of his daze. Shit, he has to stop zoning out.

"I don't owe you a fucking explanation, LaRusso," Johnny snaps.

LaRusso looks at him incredulously like Johnny's the one in the wrong here. He really doesn't owe him a fucking explanation about why he joined Cobra Kai.

"Really?" LaRusso says, voice dangerously calm. "Why do *you* get to have fun? After what you put me through? *You* get to have fun after all that?"

Johnny feels…almost guilty. He didn't do anything fucking wrong though. He was just putting LaRusso in his place. LaRusso can't just take his girl and not expect to get his ass kicked.

"You took my girl," Johnny hisses. "You stole fucking everything from me!"

"She wasn't yours! You guys broke up! You kicked my ass for months! And you think you deserve to have fun? You think you deserve to win? What the fuck, man?"

LaRusso knocks his forehead into Johnny's, causing him to stumble back. What the fuck?

"The fuck, man," LaRusso growls. "You think you're some fucking hero because you finally decided not to hurt me? Get the fuck over yourself."

LaRusso storms out, leaving Johnny super confused.

Why does he feel guilty? It's not like he and the guys did anything wrong when LaRusso got here. They were just roughing him up. Teaching him a lesson. He doesn't know why it feels so wrong now.

☆

(Johnny waits until the parking lot empties out before he leaves, sitting with this sickening guilt in his stomach. It feels all consuming, like it's eating him from the inside out.

He hates it.)

☆

Johnny spends the fifteenth loop in the diner again, taking slow sips of water while guilt eats him from the inside out. Did they really go too far with LaRusso? He'd…deserved it, hadn't he?

He's the one who got involved in Johnny's business. Johnny had just kicked his ass to teach him a lesson. It…it was the right thing to do.

Yeah, it was the right thing.

Johnny falls into a fitful sleep at the dining booth, head buried in his arms. He dreams of Kreese choking him and LaRusso glaring at him and Bobby telling him he needs to talk to LaRusso.

None of it lessens the guilt in his stomach.

He wakes to the sound of voices in the diner, doing his best to feign sleep still so he doesn't interrupt whatever sort of conversation they're having. It's all kind of muffled, sounding like it's coming from the back of the diner. It starts to get clearer as they approach Johnny's table.

Fuck, is that really who he thinks it is?

"Really, thank you, Mrs. Thompson," LaRusso says, familiar Jersey accent punctuating his words. "My mom's been looking everywhere for this jacket."

"I thought I told you to call me Jenny," Jenny teases, a smile peeking through her words. "It's not a problem, sweetheart. Tell your mother I said hi."

Sneakers squeak as they stop next to his table.

"What's he doing here?" LaRusso asks, doing a horrible job at keeping the suspicion and anger out of his voice. "Did he say anything to you?"

Asshole.

He didn't even know LaRusso's mom worked here, so he can't be faulted for that. He just came here because Bobby brought him here and it's peaceful. Fuck off, LaRusso.

"He ordered ice water and pancakes," Jenny replies, tone still teasing. "He's been here all day, poor kid. Didn't seem like he was studying either, so I thought he must be a runaway or something. Probably just needed a place to stay for the day."

Johnny's heart clenches in his chest like it does whenever Bobby does something stupidly nice for him. Curse his dumbass heart.

"Uh huh," LaRusso says, not sounding any less suspicious.

"Do you mind waking him, hon? I have to finish locking up the back."

"Of course, Mrs. Thompson."

LaRusso's so fucking fake. What an asshole.

Johnny listens to Jenny's heels tap against the ground as she walks away, trying to appear as relaxed as he can. He has some experience with pretending like he hasn't been listening to people's conversations, but he prefers not to use it.

LaRusso shakes his shoulder rather roughly and Johnny doesn't even have to pretend to shoot up, blinking rapidly as he looks up at LaRusso. Shit, all the lights in the diner are off. How long was he asleep for?

LaRusso stands with his arms crossed over his chest and chin tilted up. He's only visible thanks to the moonlight and street lights coming in through the window, barely illuminating his figure.

He's still wearing his hachimaki. What a dork.

"What the hell are you doing here?" LaRusso asks, tone way too accusing for someone who hasn't even seen him today.

Johnny looks down to his plate of pancakes and the melting ice in his cup before glancing back at LaRusso. Isn't it obvious?

LaRusso makes a frustrated noise, hands clenching at his sides.

"I mean what are you doing here instead of at the tournament?" LaRusso asks, sounding annoyed that he has to repeat it twice. "Were you watching it? Spying?"

Yeah, like he's some sort of spy for Cobra Kai. Kreese would probably have him sign up for lessons with Mr. Miyagi and slowly invade their practices if that was gonna happen. Not that it would, because Kreese is about as direct as a dodgeball to the face.

He flicks his eyes up to the TV that's been turned off.

It's just been playing the news all day anyways.

"No," Johnny says, feeling a little ridiculous. "Don't you have a first place trophy to celebrate? Instead of, y'know, interrogating me?"

LaRusso's brows furrow, fists loosening at his sides.

"I didn't get first place. I got second place," LaRusso tells him, blinking a bit.

What?

"What?" Johnny says. "No- you- that's impossible."

LaRusso smirks.

"Were you *cheering* for me, Johnny? Is that why you didn't come today? Wanted to support me from the sidelines?"

He is so fucking mouthy. And cocky. No, Johnny wasn't cheering for him. He's just fucking confused. How could LaRusso not win?

"No, shut up," Johnny rushes out, not really feeling the need to stretch that argument out. He's not here to bullshit. "Who the fuck did you lose to?"

LaRusso's smirk falls, clearly losing the point of the conversation.

"Danny Duval? What's going on?" LaRusso asks, brows furrowing. "What is this about, man?"

Danny Duval? The guy Johnny beat? Was he really better than LaRusso?

"You were supposed to win. You're supposed to get first place. That's…that's what's supposed to happen," Johnny explains, feeling oddly like he's scrambling for an explanation. "You're supposed to win the All-Valley."

LaRusso blinks at him like he's not sure whether Johnny's joking or

not.

Frankly, Johnny feels the same way.

“Look, if this is your way of trying to apologize then…thanks?” LaRusso says. “I mean, you were kind of an-”

“I’m not apologizing,” Johnny cuts him off. “I didn’t do anything wrong.”

LaRusso gapes at him.

What? Johnny’s right.

(Johnny feels shame and guilt curl in his belly. It feels like a promise. Like they’re telling him just how awful he was. Just how much he deserved to be stuck in this time loop.

He ignores it.

It’s not a big deal.)

“Seriously?” LaRusso says, lips curling up in a snarl.

They are not doing this again. He’s not going to be reprimanded by LaRusso a-fucking-gain.

“Shut up, LaRusso,” Johnny snaps. “Sit your ass down. You look stupid just standing there.”

LaRusso tilts his chin up defiantly. Stubborn little asshole.

“Whatever,” Johnny huffs.

They stand there in silence for a few moments, Johnny fiddling with his thumbs and LaRusso shifting his weight from foot to foot.

(*“Give him a chance,”* Bobby had said.

Fuck, he hates it when he listens to Bobby’s stupidly kind words. When he actually takes Bobby’s advice and Bobby ends up being right. He just hopes he’s right this time.)

Ali was always telling him he needed to talk more too. That he needed to be nice to Susan and Barbara and Jessica, all of Ali’s friends. He was just never good at starting conversations with them.

“Fine,” Johnny says, fiddling with the straw of his drink. “I hate my sensei, dude. He’s…he’s an asshole. He hurts people.”

He keeps feeling like if he says bad shit about Kreese, then he’s going to come up behind him and choke him again.

It's stupid. It's one of the stupidest thoughts he's ever had. Kreese isn't even here. He doesn't know where he is.

"And I know he fucking wanted to hurt you tonight. I don't know if it happened, obviously," Johnny tells him, shrugging. "But it's what he wanted."

LaRusso makes a face like he's trying to figure out if Johnny's telling the truth or not, but he must ultimately decide that he is.

"Bobby fought Danny Duval," LaRusso says quietly. "It did…look like he was going to injure him."

Kreese is sick. They don't even know Danny Duval or give a single shit about him. He's not the one who waltzed into their dojo and challenged them.

"Who'd you fight then?" Johnny asks, wondering how this loop changed.

"I don't remember his name honestly. Nobody from Cobra Kai."

If Kreese finds him, he is going to fucking kill him.

They're both quiet for a moment.

"What do you mean I was supposed to win tonight?" LaRusso asks quietly.

It occurs, wildly, to Johnny that he can say anything right now and none of it will matter. LaRusso won't even remember this tomorrow.

"I've lived this day fifteen times, man," Johnny tells him seriously.

LaRusso snorts. Of course he wouldn't believe him. Johnny's an idiot for even trying.

He looks away from LaRusso, not saying anything. He refuses to take it back. He's listening to Bobby.

LaRusso stops laughing when he seems to realize Johnny is being one

hundred percent serious.

"Wait, seriously? Like you've lived the tournament day over and over?" LaRusso asks, finally deciding to slide into the seat across from Johnny. "Did you lose?"

"Shut up, LaRusso," Johnny snaps. "Yes, I lost. I keep fucking losing, so laugh it up."

LaRusso just rolls his eyes at him. Bastard.

"Shut up, Johnny," LaRusso snaps back. "Maybe we can get you out of here tonight if you're lucky."

Johnny rolls his eyes.

Yeah, right. Like LaRusso is gonna be his savior. As if.

"Yeah, sure. Any ideas, hot shot?" Johnny shoots back. Yeah, right. Like LaRusso had any ideas on how to fix this.

LaRusso couldn't perform a miracle. Johnny is going to be stuck here forever.

"Maybe you're supposed to be learning some kind of lesson?" LaRusso says, tilting his head.

He's not looking at Johnny, staring off into space somewhere beside Johnny's head.

"Lesson about what?" Johnny asks.

He already stopped Bobby from injuring LaRusso. What more does he have to do?

LaRusso gives Johnny a look like he's an idiot which, shut up.

"I don't know. Probably about beating me up for months?" LaRusso says all casually but with that sassy undertone he has sometimes.

Johnny glares.

Guilt gnaws at him.

"What lesson would I learn?" Johnny snaps. "Not to fucking do it? I haven't for a month, LaRusso. Lesson learned."

"You don't even…feel bad?" LaRusso asks, sounding so quiet. "You don't regret it?"

The guilt feels stronger than before. Like it's going to consume him. Like it's going to swallow him whole.

LaRusso stares at his lap, looking tense and droopy at the same time.

Shit, why does Johnny feel so bad? He and the guys weren't in the wrong, were they? …were they?

"I don't regret all of it," Johnny mumbles, if only to release some of the guilt. "I don't feel bad about that night on the beach. You got involved."

"Because you took her radio. You were being an asshole," LaRusso says, slight heat to his voice. "You have a mom, Johnny. What would you do if that had been her?"

Johnny winces, thinking about how that *is* his mom. The way Sid yells at her. The way he gets in her face. How his mother stands through all of it with shaking limbs and a quivering voice.

Johnny feels sick.

He doesn't say anything. LaRusso doesn't need to know about Sid.

They're not friends anyways. LaRusso's just helping him out of this time loop. That's it.

"You wouldn't have been able to just sit there," LaRusso continues when Johnny doesn't say anything. "Do you blame me?"

Johnny thinks of how he does just sit there. How he watches his mom take Sid's yelling and insults and everything and never complains. She does it for them. She always has.

"It still wasn't yours to get involved with," Johnny tells him fiercely, clenching his teeth. He feels oddly like he might cry.

"So?" LaRusso spits back. "And what about Halloween, huh? Or the cliff? Or the country club? Or when you drove past me and Ali with your friends?"

Bringing up the country club is just a party foul. LaRusso tripped himself. If he's talking about the kiss, that's between him and Ali. He's felt stupid guilt over the kiss before, he's over it. He was just trying to

make LaRusso jealous anyways.

“You spilled water on me on Halloween! That one was fair!” Johnny growls even though it’s starting to…not feel fair. Fuck. “Fine, the cliff was stupid since we didn’t even fight. And the country club thing is between me and Ali, not you, dumbass. And the shit at Golf N’ Stuff was barely anything! You’re such a girl, LaRusso.”

“How was Halloween fair?” LaRusso snaps, nearly yelling. “You guys beat the shit out of me!”

“Fine, it wasn’t fucking fair, okay?” Johnny yells back. “Jesus, is that what you want to hear to make yourself feel better?”

The words ring out in the silent room.

Johnny feels his cheeks flush. It feels almost like he…apologized. The fuck?

LaRusso must be feeling the same way if the bewilderment in the way he stares at Johnny is any indication.

“I…thanks,” LaRusso mumbles, staring at the table in front of him. “You know it’s not just the mommy shit, Johnny. The car, fucking everything. You Encino assholes always act like you’re better than everybody just because you have a fancy ass mansion in the Hills. You’ve never had a tough fucking day in your life.”

Johnny rolls his eyes.

What does LaRusso know about him? Never had a tough fucking day, the fuck. He worked fucking hard at karate, thank you very much. He’s had some tough fucking days.

LaRusso doesn’t know shit. Boo fucking hoo, his mom’s car sucks and he doesn’t have one. Is Johnny supposed to feel bad for him? Give him fucking money?

Johnny grew up poor too. He hadn’t know Hill life until he was eight or so and it fucking sucked. He’d give the Avanti, karate, and his left hand to be able to live comfortably and have it just be him and his mom.

“Shut up, Jesus. That’s all you fucking talk about. You’re from Reseda, so fucking what?” Johnny says, throwing his hands up. “You don’t know shit about Encino, asshole. You’d never survive a fucking day in

Encino.”

LaRusso’s fists clench.

“Oh yeah, you must have it so tough, huh? Living it up in the Hills, partying everyday. Like you could ever survive a fucking day in Reseda. You’d die if your sink broke and you couldn’t style your stupid hair.”

If Johnny wasn’t so angry, he might actually laugh at that.

“A country club would eat you alive, LaRusso,” Johnny sneers.

“I fucking know! Jesus Christ, I fucking know, okay? You think I don’t fucking know that?” LaRusso yells. “God, you’re such a dick! I know they’d fucking hate me there, don’t rub it in.”

Johnny blinks, surprised.

Was…was LaRusso thinking about this when he’d gone to pick Ali up? How they’d laughed at him?

LaRusso’s shaking, nails digging into his palms. He shoves himself up from the table abruptly, stumbling out of the booth.

Johnny doesn’t know what compels him to, but he reaches out to snatch the back of LaRusso’s shirt.

“Let go,” LaRusso says firmly, but his voice shakes. “I want to fucking leave.”

“You can go,” Johnny tells him, knowing for a fact that the grip he has isn’t that strong. “You’re not that weak.”

“Shitty compliment,” LaRusso comments weakly. “Just say what you’re going to say.”

Johnny opens and closes his mouth, not really sure what he’s going to say.

He’s not sorry for saying it. He didn’t even know it was a sore spot for LaRusso.

He thinks for a moment, sighing.

He can’t believe he’s saying this.

“You don’t want to fit into country club life,” Johnny mumbles. “Everyone’s fake. They’re just looking for an excuse to brag about their money so they don’t have to deal with their own shit lives.”

LaRusso sighs, untensing slightly in Johnny’s grasp.

“That include Ali?” he asks, a hint of humor to his voice.

Johnny almost chuckles.

No, Ali was real. She was one of the realest people he’d ever met. She didn’t try to fake anything about who she was. She was sporty, funny, and she didn’t put up with his bullshit.

Johnny loved it when they were together. It was so annoying now that they weren’t.

It didn’t change that she wasn’t anything like her parents though. She wasn’t like Sid or any of the other country club gossips. She was so incredibly real that it made Johnny ache to be like her. To be real.

“No,” Johnny murmurs. “She’s nothing like those other country club assholes.”

“Like you?”

Fucker’s definitely smiling now. Johnny doesn’t know why he’s glad for it.

“Yeah, laugh it up, LaRusso. Real funny,” Johnny grumbles even though he secretly likes that LaRusso’s smiling now. Even if it’s at his expense. What is wrong with him?

“Don’t worry, Johnny, already am,” LaRusso tells him goodnaturedly, turning his head over his shoulder to smirk at him.

He’s such a cocky little shit.

Somehow it’s not pissing Johnny off like it usually would.

“Whatever, LaRusso. Don’t you have to get home or something?” Johnny asks, finally letting go of LaRusso’s shirt as he climbs to his feet.

LaRusso’s eyes widen.

“Shit, yeah,” LaRusso says. “Hey, I’ll see you tomorrow, man. Or in

your next loop, I don't know."

"Don't think I learned my lesson enough?" Johnny says. He's teasing, but the notion that he hasn't really learned his lesson sort of stings. He apologized to LaRusso. Wasn't that enough?

LaRusso shrugs.

"I don't know, man. I don't control the universe," LaRusso tells him, punching him in the arm like they're old buddies. "Seriously, I gotta go. See ya."

Johnny watches him run out into the cold December night, truck speeding off.

Johnny hopes this was good. He hopes he wakes up on December 20th tomorrow.

☆

Johnny's pissed when he wakes up to Sid yelling again.

He doesn't even bother to roll out of bed immediately, waiting until the last possible minute to drive to the stupid fucking tournament.

What more does he have to do? Befriend LaRusso? Make him a fucking cake? Pay for a new car for him?

Bobby's not outside waiting for him by the time Johnny gets there, which means he's probably not going to catch LaRusso. Shit.

He drops down to a sitting position, burying his face in his knees.

He doesn't give a shit who bugs him. He is not going into that fucking building. He's not. He already decided that.

He only looks up when he hears footsteps and shit, maybe he didn't miss LaRusso.

It's the same sight as a few loops ago. LaRusso blabbing away in Ali's ear while LaRusso's sensei just walks beside him.

Johnny doesn't know what he did wrong last loop, but he's going to fix this. He's going to do this right.

Johnny shoots up as LaRusso gets closer to the doors.

“I need to talk to you,” he blurts before LaRusso even gets a chance to say anything. “Like right now.”

Ali curls in on LaRusso protectively just like she did last time, glaring at him. She almost looks taller than him curled in so close.

“About what?” LaRusso asks in that same hostile tone as before.

Ali opens her mouth, but Johnny is not doing this all over again. He’s talking to LaRusso. He did it yesterday and he can do it today.

“Look, it’s important, man,” Johnny says, cutting Ali off. “Just- please?”

He almost cringes at himself. He sounds so pathetic.

LaRusso and Ali’s eyes widen. What? Why the hell do they look like that?

LaRusso leans down to whisper something in Ali’s ear, eyes flitting towards Johnny and then away. Ali frowns, but she nods a little.

“Alright, talk,” LaRusso says, crossing his arms over his chest.

Johnny blinks, looking between Ali, LaRusso, and LaRusso’s sensei. Here? In front of all of them? It was more of a conversation for just LaRusso.

“I want to talk to just you,” Johnny says, pointing at LaRusso. “Like alone. Like not near here.”

“Hey, if it can be said in front of me, it can be said in front of them,” LaRusso replies easily. Who is he, Johnny’s mom? His teacher?

“Uh, it really can’t,” Johnny tells him, not really wanting the others to know. This is about LaRusso. “Seriously, can we go to the side or something?”

“No,” Ali cuts in, frowning. “Spit it out, Johnny. The tournament starts soon.”

Johnny doesn’t even give a shit about the tournament.

He pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs. Fine, he’s really doing this then.

“I’m stuck living this day over and over. This is the sixteenth fucking

time and it has to do with you, LaRusso," Johnny says, stepping forward to jab a finger into LaRusso's chest.

LaRusso gapes at him, looking to his sensei who's just been looking at Johnny this whole time. Ali stares at him.

This is exactly why he didn't want to do this in front of a bunch of people. He knows it sounds ridiculous. He knows it sounds impossible. He knows, okay?

"Is that possible, Mr. Miyagi?" LaRusso asks and okay, maybe he had an easier time believing Johnny when it was just them in a dark diner.

Mr. Miyagi shrugs.

"Have heard of it before," he says.

LaRusso blinks back wildly at Johnny with those big Bambi eyes, looking back at Ali. Ali's eyes haven't left Johnny and yeah, Johnny's wanted that but not like this.

LaRusso surges forward to grab onto Johnny's jacket, dragging him over to the side of the building so they're no longer in view of Ali or Mr. Miyagi.

Johnny doesn't complain though. As long as they can finally talk not in front of other people.

"Watch it, LaRusso," Johnny says, if only to keep up some semblance of appearance. "The jacket cost more than you think."

"You got that for free from Kreese and you know it, asshole," LaRusso bites and alright, he's right but shut up. "Are you serious? Have you told me this before?"

"Yeah, yesterday. Or- my yesterday. Today? I don't know, man, it's confusing," Johnny shrugs. "We talked at the diner near Cobra Kai."

"What'd we talk about?" LaRusso asks thoughtfully, looking past Johnny's head in thought just like yesterday.

Johnny shuffles a bit in place. It'd been…weirdly vulnerable to say all the shit he said to LaRusso yesterday. He has a feeling he's not getting out of this time loop unless he can befriend LaRusso though, so might as well.

“Halloween was fucked up,” Johnny says, looking at his feet. “And… we talked about country clubs. You don’t want to fit in there, LaRusso. People suck there. It’s not worth it.”

LaRusso sucks in a breath and Johnny looks up to meet his eyes without even meaning to. He’s staring at Johnny, looking surprised.

“Shit,” he breathes out. “I guess you’re not lying then.”

“Yeah,” Johnny murmurs, kicking at a rock on the ground. “I don’t really give a shit about the tournament anymore, I guess. Want to get the fuck out of here?”

LaRusso blinks at him, looking back over the side of the building where Ali and Mr. Miyagi must still be and then back at Johnny. He looks conflicted, fiddling with a loose string at the edge of his shirt.

"What if this is the last loop, man?" LaRusso asks. "I know it doesn't matter to you, but it's open season on me if I lose. I just…I can't just leave."

Johnny winces. He'd almost forgotten about Kreese's threat.

"If it's been sixteen loops already, there'll be a seventeenth," Johnny assures, somehow knowing the universe isn't done fucking with him yet.

LaRusso doesn't look as sure, still glancing back at the building.

"C'mon, LaRusso," Johnny says. He needs to break the loop, but he knows he's not going to do it this time. "If I feel like the loop is going to end, I'll come back to the tournament. Deal?"

LaRusso eyes the hand that Johnny holds out suspiciously, glancing between Johnny's face and his hand.

LaRusso sighs.

"Deal," LaRusso grumbles, shaking Johnny's hand. "Where are we going?"

Johnny hadn't really thought that far. He'd just wanted to get away from the tournament and away from Kreese.

"Beach?" Johnny says, just saying the first thing that comes to mind.

LaRusso shrugs.

"Sure."

☆

LaRusso likes the Avanti.

He traces his fingers along the edge where Johnny's put the top up, blinking up at Johnny.

"Dude," he says, voice full of awe. "This thing is fucking awesome. Where'd you get it?"

Johnny almost puffs his chest up with pride. He does take care of his car by doing all the usual maintenance bullshit. Johnny's still proud of it even though it was paid for on Sid's dime.

"Birthday gift," Johnny replies loosely, a half-truth.

It'd been his birthday gift to himself last year. He'd gone out and bought the nicest red car he could find with Sid's credit card.

He and his mom didn't really celebrate his birthday anymore and sure, celebrating with the guys was nice, but he missed celebrating his birthday with his mom. Not that he'd say that out loud. Not that it mattered last year anyways since the car pissed Sid off and that was enough for Johnny.

"Some birthday gift," LaRusso whistles, tugging the passenger door open. "I got a car for my birthday too. It's a Ford Super Deluxe."

"Old car. How's it drive?" Johnny asks, climbing into the driver's side.

"Like butter. Mr. Miyagi gave it to me."

Johnny tightens his hand on the wheel, clearing his throat. Must be nice to have someone to actually give you gifts on your birthday.

"Bet the Avanti could outdrive it any day of the week," Johnny challenges, trying to forget the tightness in his throat.

"Please," LaRusso snorts. "Your car'll give out within the first mile."

"Really? Wanna bet, LaRusso?"

"Yeah, I do wanna bet."

LaRusso's leaning back in the passenger seat, open and relaxed with a challenge in his eyes and a smirk on his lips. Johnny feels the fire of competition flare inside of him and it doesn't feel all consuming for once. It doesn't feel like he has to get something right.

It feels easy like it would with Bobby or Dutch. Like he's just fucking around with one of the guys.

Huh.

Is he supposed to befriend LaRusso? Is that really the solution?

"Unless you're too scared?" LaRusso's annoying voice goads and Johnny comes back to himself.

Shit, he has seriously got to stop zoning out.

"As if. You're on, LaRusso," Johnny tells him, smirking to himself.

Oh, LaRusso has no idea what he's in for.

Johnny steps on the gas, speeding off in the direction of the beach. LaRusso gasps, hands flying up to grasp at the sides of the car.

"Shit, man, give a guy a warning," LaRusso says, all breathy and pitched from how surprised he sounds.

Johnny laughs.

LaRusso pouts.

"Oh shut up, man. You'll see. I'll bring the Ford around tomorrow and we'll race. No fancy schmancy Avanti is beating that."

"Yeah, keep telling yourself that, LaRusso."

☆

They argue about it all the way to the beach.

It's way too easy to goad LaRusso into arguing about it more every time he says he'll stop. All Johnny has to do is bring up how the Avanti has better mileage and it gets LaRusso going every time.

"Oh come on," LaRusso complains as he steps out of the car. "It doesn't matter that it was made last year. It's probably just a piece of shit that looks nice."

“And your car was made forty years ago, LaRusso,” Johnny argues back, no real heat to his voice. “Mine drove nice and easy the whole way here.”

“No thanks to you. Do you even know what the speed limit is?” LaRusso grumbles.

“Nope.”

“Asshole.”

“Princess.”

LaRusso opens his mouth again but closes it as his sneakers hit the sand.

He looks out at the waves, getting this serene look on his face like it’s his very first time here.

Johnny gets it.

Living in California has some perks and the beach is definitely one of them. For all the country club bullshit Johnny puts up with in Encino, he’ll take it if it means he gets to go to the beach whenever he feels like it.

“It’s nice out here, huh?” Johnny says, closing his eyes as the ocean breeze pushes his hair back.

“Yeah,” LaRusso murmurs softly. “Y’know, Mr. Miyagi and I came here to train some time ago. Froze my ass off in the ocean.”

“Yeah, what the hell was he teaching you? How to kick up sand?” Johnny teases, chuckling to himself.

“No, balance. You gotta have balance. Physical and mental, Johnny.”

Johnny kind of wants to tell him it’s bullshit, but he doesn’t. He is supposed to be befriending LaRusso, after all.

LaRusso levels him with a leer that Johnny does not like at all.

“I also learned this cool new move I could show you,” LaRusso says casually.

Oh, he already knows this one.

“Nuh uh,” Johnny says, shaking his head vehemently. “I am not getting kicked in the face again, LaRusso. No fucking way. Nice try.”

LaRusso blinks at him.

“Shit, did I use that in the tournament? That’s so sick. You should have let me stay for the tournament.”

“And get kicked in the face again?”

LaRusso raises an eyebrow, tilting his head in a *‘duh’* motion.

“No way, man.” Johnny shakes his head again. “Nice try.”

“Boring.”

“You’re boring.”

“Race you down to the beach.”

“What?”

LaRusso doesn’t give him a chance to even catch up, already taking off down towards the water, cackling.

What a little asshole. Johnny is so going to beat him.

He takes off after LaRusso. Shit, he has not had to run in sand since he raced Bobby a while ago. This shit sucks.

LaRusso stumbles a little and almost falls, a poor imitation of a baby deer and Johnny cackles before almost falling himself.

LaRusso turns around as he runs, jogging backwards and glaring at Johnny.

“Oh yeah, laugh, Johnny. You’re still gonna lo-”

LaRusso trips backwards, limbs flailing as he lands in the sand. Johnny’s laughing too hard to keep running, collapsing next to LaRusso.

“Asshole,” LaRusso mumbles. “Jesus, would you quit laughing? It wasn’t that funny.”

But Johnny can’t stop. His stomach is cramping and tears are streaming down his face, legs kicking a little at the sand. He couldn’t

even describe why it's so funny. Something about LaRusso's expression as he fell or the way he fell was just too fucking funny to Johnny.

Johnny eventually calms down, turning onto his back to look up at LaRusso.

LaRusso just sits there with his knees tucked up to his chest, staring at Johnny with those big brown eyes. He looks almost…thoughtful like that. Like he's trying to figure Johnny out.

Ali used to look the same way.

"You done, blondie?" LaRusso asks, raising an eyebrow at him.

Yeah, Johnny's done laughing, but he's not really done messing with LaRusso. He leans up on his elbow, gazing up at him.

"Yeah, I'm done," Johnny murmurs, digging his hand into the sand and slowly scooting closer to LaRusso. LaRusso doesn't move, squinting at him like he's trying to see what Johnny's plan is.

Oh, this is too good.

Johnny grabs a fistful of sand.

"Stop staring, dude, you're creeping me out," LaRusso tells him, pressing his palm to Johnny's forehead. He's clearly fighting back a grin though, mouth all curled up like he can barely suppress a smile.

Johnny ducks under LaRusso's hand, lunging at him like a lion and dumping sand down his shirt. LaRusso yelps, wrestling under Johnny's weight.

Johnny's not letting him get away just yet though.

"Asshole! LaRusso yells. "It's cold, dude! And you're heavy, get off!"

Johnny laughs, pressing LaRusso's shirt down just to make him even more sand covered.

LaRusso yelps again, slapping at Johnny's back. He's grinning though, clearly struggling not to laugh.

Johnny kind of likes messing with him like this. Like he's one of the guys and not Johnny's sworn karate rival.

Johnny pushes back against LaRusso's grip without any sort of force

behind it, sticking his tongue out at him.

LaRusso gives him that familiar smirk and before Johnny can even process it, he's on his back facing the sky.

His first thought is his stomach fucking hurts.

His second thought is that LaRusso's kick was kind of impressive.

Is this what he was practicing on the beach? Jesus, Johnny kind of wants to spar with him now. He wants to see what else LaRusso has in him.

LaRusso's face comes into view above him, big brown eyes full of concern as they stare down at him.

"Shit, are you okay, man? Did I kick you too hard?" LaRusso asks, knees pressing into Johnny's arm.

As if LaRusso could ever kick him hard enough to hurt. The crane kick was an exception and that was because it caught Johnny off guard.

"Johnny, dude, talk to me. Did you get a concussion?"

Sand would never give him a concussion. LaRusso is such an idiot.

LaRusso leans closer, big eyes roaming over Johnny's face. He looks so ridiculous. His big brown eyes and floppy hair and big teeth. What does Ali even see in him? Probably her own reflection in his dark eyes.

"Johnny, man," LaRusso murmurs. "Are you sick?"

Johnny comes back to himself as soon as LaRusso touches his forehead, jolting up and almost knocking his nose into LaRusso's chin.

"Jesus, finally. The fuck, man? Did you die or something?" LaRusso says, relief coloring his voice even though he's clearly going for exasperated.

What the hell's with him? Johnny's fine. LaRusso's just overreacting.

"Chill, LaRusso," Johnny tells him, punching him lightly in the shoulder. Jeez, this time loop shit has made him soft. "I'm fine. Was just thinking about stuff."

“Don’t hurt yourself.”

“Asshole.”

They’re both quiet for a moment.

Johnny lets the sand and ocean breeze wash over him, tilting his head back towards the sky. It’s so nice out here. Johnny could probably live this version of the loop forever.

He tilts his head over to LaRusso, watching the way he breathes in time with the waves. He’s so…Johnny doesn’t even know. He kind of wants to spar with him. Kind of wants to see what LaRusso’s like outside of a tournament.

“We should spar,” Johnny blurts.

LaRusso blinks at him.

For a minute, Johnny thinks he might turn him down. He thinks LaRusso might walk away right now, tell him no way. It makes him disappointed for some reason.

“You’re on, Johnny,” LaRusso tells him, smiling that smug little smile at him.

Johnny feels relieved for some reason.

☆

They spar until the sun goes down and the sand cools beneath their feet.

It’s exhilarating.

Johnny’s always liked sparring. It’s a way to wash a day of bullshit off his back, a way to forget everything about Sid and school and all of it. It’s a relief.

Sparring with LaRusso isn’t really any different than sparring at the dojo, but it sort of is. LaRusso’s fast and nimble, dodging Johnny’s punches left and right. He’s nothing like Dutch or Bobby or Jimmy or Tommy. He’s calmer, more calculated than any of them.

It’s impressive. It’s annoying. It sets Johnny on fire.

Johnny gets thrown on his ass more times than he can count, but he

kind of loves it.

LaRusso's such a different type of fighter compared to the cobras. Johnny wants to learn all of it. He wants to learn how to defend against it and he wants to learn how to earn points against it.

Johnny only stops when he can't see LaRusso in front of him, collapsing back onto the sand. Sand sticks to the sweaty skin of his arms and neck, but Johnny can't bring himself to care.

He feels wrung out in a good way. Like he always does after a workout or a good spar session with the guys.

LaRusso's sitting cross legged at Johnny's feet, gaze focused on the ocean in front of him. He rolls his shoulders, swinging his neck from side to side until it cracks. He looks kind of like one of Sid's fancy paintings that he has up instead of pictures.

LaRusso shrugs his shoulders once more, his gaze settling on Johnny as he tilts his head to the side.

The ocean crashes against the shore, not nearly close enough to either of them to touch.

"I had fun today," LaRusso says quietly, his voice almost too loud in the peace of the night. "Thanks for this, man."

Johnny feels struck, throat tightening like he might cry.

He almost feels like he doesn't deserve it? Like he did standing there next to Kreese during the first loop when he was going to be awarded the first place trophy.

It's strange because LaRusso's just thanking him. He did do something nice for LaRusso. It's not like he doesn't deserve the gratitude.

"Yeah," Johnny mumbles, coughing a bit to clear the tightness in his throat. "Yeah, you're welcome, man. Any time."

LaRusso smiles lopsidedly.

"Hey, find me next time too. We'll figure this out together, man."

Fire flares in Johnny's gut.

This is Johnny's burden to figure out. Johnny's shit to sort out. He doesn't need anyone like LaRusso trying to help him out.

But LaRusso's looking at him so earnestly, reminding him so much of Bobby that Johnny can't help but let the fire fizzle out.

It was Bobby's idea in the first place and it wasn't exactly a total failure.

Johnny sighs.

"Should be easy to spot your scrawny ass," Johnny teases, because he can't help himself.

LaRusso squawks, hitting Johnny's leg. God, he's too easy to mess with.

Johnny grins.

"Shut up, asshole," LaRusso grumbles, but there's no heat to it. Johnny's even willing to bet he's smiling. "C'mon, it's getting late. I need to get home."

"Did you even tell anyone where you were going?" Johnny asks, slowly pushing himself up onto his elbows.

"Shit," LaRusso swears, scrambling to his feet. "Damn it. My ma's probably freaking out. She's probably wondering where I went."

Johnny feels a pang of jealousy.

Right, he forgets other people can't just get home whenever the fuck they want. Johnny could probably disappear for like a week and Sid and his mom probably wouldn't even notice.

"Dude," LaRusso says, snapping Johnny out of his thoughts. "C'mon, I don't have all day."

"Yeah, yeah. Don't worry, princess, you'll get home on time," Johnny tells him, taking off towards the Avanti. "This thing practically flies, LaRusso."

"Don't kill us."

"Shut up, LaRusso."

☆

LaRusso falls asleep on the ride back.

Johnny turns down the radio so he can sleep better.

It's interesting. Johnny hated LaRusso like sixteen days ago and now he's letting the guy fall asleep in his car as he drives him home.

Somehow, Johnny knows that Bobby was right. LaRusso is the solution to this. Befriending him has to be the solution, because it's kind of fun hanging out with him. It's easy like breathing's easy. It's easy like Bobby's easy but never boring.

Johnny likes a challenge, always has. He likes competing. He likes when it feels like he might lose to Bobby and then he doesn't. He likes when it's not easy.

He likes that LaRusso's both easy and not easy. It's sort of a confusing combination if Johnny thinks too hard about it, so he chooses not to.

(If he's being truthful, it's sort of like how Ali was.

It wasn't hard to be with Ali. She was kind and smart and pretty, and she never held back. She was sweet, but she teased Johnny constantly. And Johnny loved it. Loved the push and pull.

He tries not to think about how the push and pull had somehow turned more into a tug-of-war by the end of their relationship. Or how playful grins had somehow turned into mean, doggish sneers.

He misses it more than anything though.

He wants that push and pull again. He wants someone like Ali again, but there's no one in the world like Ali.)

He parks outside of LaRusso's apartment complex.

LaRusso's slumped against the side of the Avanti, ridiculously long legs curled up to his chest.

He kind of looks like a baby deer like that. No one would ever know that he can throw people around just by looking at him.

He feels something flare up inside him. Like how he gets with the guys after a sparring session. Like he wants to clean up their cuts like he's some mom even though he knows they're fine.

Johnny shakes his head.

Jesus, LaRusso is not one of his guys. He's got to get that thought out

of his head.

Johnny reaches over to shake LaRusso awake, only having to shake him twice.

LaRusso doesn't jolt like Johnny would, instead stretching out his long limbs like he's a cat waking from a pleasant nap. He's so annoying.

"I'll see you later," LaRusso murmurs, blinking sleepily. "Thanks for the ride, man."

Johnny nods, tapping the steering wheel idly.

LaRusso climbs out of the car, slamming the door shut.

Johnny feels oddly like he should walk him up to his door like he's dropping off a date or something. Probably because he spent the day actually getting along with LaRusso. His brain probably got it confused.

He drives forward a little as LaRusso disappears behind the gate, scanning the apartments above just in case. He should at least make sure LaRusso gets home safe, right?

He watches until one of the apartments on the second floor opens and LaRusso heads in, the door shutting softly behind him.

He's just…making sure this was a good loop. Making sure LaRusso isn't kidnapped or something. That's all.

Maybe they'll go somewhere different tomorrow.

☆

Johnny takes LaRusso everywhere.

Johnny's sort of got it down to a science again. As long as he explains that he's stuck in a time loop and what happened in the fifteenth one, LaRusso's willing to help him.

In the seventeenth loop, they go to the forest. They walk and bicker and spar. LaRusso looks at home there, like he belongs there.

In the eighteenth loop, they go to the mall. Johnny buys a bunch of clothes he knows he won't be able to wear tomorrow and buys LaRusso stuff too. LaRusso laughs at Johnny when he tries something ridiculous on and thanks him for the clothes.

In the nineteenth loop, they go to the diner. Johnny orders his usual and LaRusso orders orange juice and an omelette, which Johnny rags on him for because orange juice sucks. LaRusso takes it with an eye roll and a light punch to Johnny's arm.

In the twentieth loop, Johnny suggests they go to Golf N' Stuff.

"Really?" LaRusso asks, grinning up at him. "Man, I was just there last night. Bet I'll beat you at mini golf."

Johnny hasn't been to Golf N' Stuff in forever. Not since he saw LaRusso there with Ali anyways. He figured he'd come back and they'd just be waiting around the corner kissing or something.

It's a stupid thought now, but it had been completely logical just a month or so ago.

"You're on, LaRusso," Johnny says, not one to turn down a challenge. Especially when it comes to LaRusso. "Bet I can beat you at mini golf."

"Oh please, I'm a mini golf champ."

"We'll see about that, LaRusso."

☆

LaRusso sucks at mini golf.

He's having to hit the ball three or four times to actually get the golf ball in and he's grinning like an idiot every time he does.

Somehow he's not doing worse than Johnny, who can't seem to hit the ball less than seven times. Jesus, he's usually not this bad.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" LaRusso teases, leaning against his putter like he's some fancy old rich dude. "Are your skills not up to par?"

The joke is so stupid. LaRusso is so stupid.

Johnny finds himself fighting back a smile anyways.

He's so annoying.

"I'm warming up, LaRusso," Johnny grumbles, lining his putter up with the neon green ball. "Just you wait."

“Man, you must be pretty spectacular if this is your warm up,” LaRusso says sarcastically, smirk stretching across his lips. “You know, your shot would be a lot cleaner if you actually lined it up.”

“I know how to putt, LaRusso.”

“Yeah? Is that why you’re doing it wrong?”

Johnny huffs.

What the hell does LaRusso know? Johnny’s been playing mini golf since he was old enough to bike himself over to Golf N’ Stuff. He has it down. There’s nothing LaRusso could teach him.

Johnny hits the neon green ball, sending it careening straight into the side of the wall and over it, landing right by LaRusso’s feet.

LaRusso glances down at the ball and then up at Johnny, smirk softening.

Johnny seriously doesn’t know what’s wrong with his putting today. It’s like he can’t focus enough to hit the ball in a straight line.

“Here, I’ll give you one more shot,” LaRusso says, reaching down to pick the ball up. He holds the ball up so Johnny can see it, casually rolling it between his thumb and pointer finger.

Johnny rolls his eyes.

He doesn’t need LaRusso’s pity shot, but he’ll take it anyways.

He reaches for the ball only for LaRusso to throw it up and catch it in his palm.

What the hell?

“If you let me help you,” LaRusso tells him, giving him that smug little smile.

He’s such an asshole.

Johnny opens and closes his mouth, his cheeks heating. Johnny risks his pride and dignity whether he accepts or denies the offer anyways, and LaRusso probably knows that too.

Smart bastard.

Johnny sighs, looking down at his Chucks.

On one hand, LaRusso of all people would be helping him putt of all things. On the other hand, if Johnny doesn't fix his putting then he's in for a rough ride for the rest of the game.

Johnny grits his teeth, tilting his head back.

He can't believe he's doing this.

"Fine," he relents, glaring at LaRusso. LaRusso takes it in stride though, flashing him this silly little smile.

"You'll be like Arnold Palmer once I'm done, trust me," LaRusso tells him, because he's insufferable. "Line up your shot, man."

Johnny does, begrudgingly so.

What's he doing wrong?

He's lining up his shot and everything. What the hell is LaRusso talking about?

"See, that's your issue, man," LaRusso says, like it's obvious. "You're so stiff. Loosen up a little."

Johnny loosens his grip on the putter, almost dropping it.

LaRusso makes a frustrated noise.

"No like-" Cold fingers wrap around Johnny's left wrist, adjusting his hands until the putter is swinging back and forth in his grip. "This, man."

Johnny's mind blanks, staring at LaRusso's hand around his wrist.

He'd done it so quickly, so naturally. Like it was just some normal thing to do, like they were friends instead of rivals.

"Sorry," LaRusso mumbles, pulling his hand away from Johnny's wrist. "Shouldn't have just grabbed you like that."

"It's fine," Johnny croaks out, clearing his throat afterward. Shit, what is wrong with him? "This is so stupid. You owe me twenty bucks if this shit doesn't work, LaRusso."

LaRusso huffs out a laugh.

“Just try it, man.”

Johnny lines up his shot, letting the putter swing loosely in his hands before hitting the ball.

It doesn’t exactly get to the hole, but it does get a lot closer.

Johnny manages to hit in with only two more hits.

Johnny already knows LaRusso’s smiling like a smug bastard before he even turns around to look at him.

“So, did it work?” LaRusso asks, the look on his face telling Johnny he already knows the answer. Bastard.

“Shut up, LaRusso.”

☆

LaRusso just barely ekes out a win against him and only on a technicality.

“Bullshit, LaRusso. You cheated.”

“Hey, how was I supposed to know the windmill would knock the ball in? Not that it did. The ball just went in.”

“You’re such a liar.”

Johnny lets it go though, shaking his head with a soft huff.

Whatever, it’s not like it’s the first time he’s lost to LaRusso in the past twenty days.

He leans quietly against the fence while waiting for LaRusso to come back from returning their clubs, looking over at the other patrons. It’s mostly couples or kids who have nothing better to do with their winter break except play round after round of mini golf.

Will they be here tomorrow? Do they change even when Johnny doesn’t?

“You want to play some more?” LaRusso asks and Johnny just about jumps a foot in the air.

He’s so quiet. Johnny didn’t even hear him coming.

He turns around, clutching his red jacket. LaRusso looks only amused, raising his eyebrows.

“Wow, did I scare *you* ? The great Johnny Lawrence?” LaRusso teases, settling himself against the fence beside Johnny. “Sheesh, didn’t think that was possible.”

“That a compliment, LaRusso?” Johnny says, not asking. It does, oddly enough, sound like a compliment. It doesn’t make sense, considering the fact LaRusso hates him.

LaRusso smiles, a soft smile that Johnny’s never seen before.

“Y’know, this is where I took Ali for our first date,” LaRusso says abruptly, eyes falling to the other happy couples playing mini golf. “We did foosball and mini golf, and we did those spinny things and raced. I keep the picture booth photos in my wallet.”

Johnny expects himself to feel something like pissed off or sad, but all he feels is slighted. Like somehow LaRusso’s trying to get one over him.

“Ali and I never went here,” Johnny replies, because he’s not really sure what he should say to that. “Our first date was just some fancy dinner. We used to drive around a lot since her parents were kind of strict. Didn’t want us to go anywhere dirty or let me in her room.”

Johnny shrugs.

Ali’s parents were so insistent that he be a proper young man and take her to all these nice places, and Johnny never really questioned them. He liked Ali and he wanted to keep being with Ali, so he did what they said.

“Let me guess, you did it anyway?” LaRusso asks, voice teasing but somehow a bit harsher than before. The asshole’s judging Johnny, he realizes belatedly. It’s the tone of voice those country club fucks get when they think he’s high or drunk at an event, which is a fucking lot because those events are fucking stupid.

“No,” Johnny mumbles, not really sure why he’s letting LaRusso make him feel like a child who’s in trouble. “Jesus, LaRusso, we were having fun. Why’d you have to bring this shit up again?”

Seriously, LaRusso can never shut his damn mouth. That’s how he got on Johnny’s bad side in the first place.

LaRusso laughs humorlessly, smile falling into something self-deprecating.

“I keep expecting you to say you’re messing with me, man,” LaRusso tells him. “I keep thinking you’re going to say this was all a joke or something. But…you’re so nice and it’s weird. It’s like you’re…I don’t know, man, making an effort. It’s so weird.”

Johnny feels struck. Stung. Like being crane kicked in the jaw all over again.

“I…” Johnny says, swallowing. “Sorry?”

LaRusso laughs, too harsh to be normal.

“God, you really must have lived this day before. It’d be a miracle before the Johnny Lawrence I knew apologized to me.”

Johnny winces.

It stings to know that LaRusso’s…right. He’s so fucking right.

Before today, Johnny’s not sure he ever really would have apologized to LaRusso or looked in his direction again if it weren’t for this time loop.

LaRusso’s smile is tight at the edges, body pulled taut like a bow.

Johnny doesn't know what to do. If it was one of the guys, Johnny might slap them on the back. Shove them around a little until they're smiling.

But LaRusso’s…not that. And he's only sort of Johnny's friend.

Johnny feels oddly lost with the whole thing.

None of the guys have ever been this open about anything. Sure, they talk about break ups and how much they suck but nothing like this.

But Johnny's supposed to be befriending him, right? So, he reaches out and squeezes LaRusso’s shoulder and hopes it works.

LaRusso deflates all at once like a popped balloon, all droopy like he was in the fifteenth loop.

Johnny hates the way LaRusso looks when he's all droopy like this. He can't explain it, he just does.

LaRusso straightens up a little in his grip, stretching his arms out in front of him.

"Sorry, guess I should stop living in the past, huh?" LaRusso murmurs, shaking his head. "I mean, hey, you've changed. I should too."

Johnny feels sick.

The tournament isn't as far for LaRusso as it is for Johnny. He doesn't remember all these loops where he and Johnny talked and had fun.

It's…unfair to LaRusso. Like injuring LaRusso was. Like taking advantage of the injury was.

Johnny doesn't know how to say this to LaRusso though. How to tell him that's unfair and explain it any further than that.

"Just- be honest with me, LaRusso," Johnny tells him.

LaRusso tilts his head, kind of looking like a confused puppy.

Fuck, how does he say this?

Johnny stumbles a little before landing on, "Just say whatever the fuck you're thinking, LaRusso."

LaRusso smiles warmly at him, a close lipped beam.

"Don't think that'll be a problem, Johnny," LaRusso teases, a playful grin crossing his lips. "Don't worry. I have zero problem being honest with you."

LaRusso knocks into Johnny's side, displacing the hand from his shoulder with ease.

He's so annoying, but Johnny's glad he's not holding himself so tight anymore.

"C'mon, I need to beat you at skee ball," LaRusso says, speeding off towards the arcade.

Johnny jogs after him even though he doesn't need to.

It's good that he's feeling better, at least. And that he'll be honest with Johnny if only for the night.

☆

LaRusso sucks at skee ball and probably wouldn't lose a game of foosball even if his eyes were closed.

"Jesus, LaRusso," Johnny grumbles. "Remind me not to play you for money."

LaRusso laughs, throwing his head back with a bright grin.

"Y'know, I did hustle some guy when I lived back in Jersey," LaRusso says casually, leaning against the foosball table with a sly look in his eye. "He deserved it though. He was being a dick."

Johnny stares at him wide-eyed. He can't help but be a little bit in awe of LaRusso. Who knew the bastard had it in him.

"You're a real Paul Newman, arentcha?" Johnny whistles, shaking his head.

LaRusso's lips curl like he's sucking a lemon, clearly trying to hide a laugh. The fuck? Is there something on Johnny's face? What is he-

Oh.

Asshole.

Johnny shoves him playfully, LaRusso bursting into a fit of laughter. He can't believe this fucker.

"Jesus, of course you'd like that movie," Johnny huffs, shaking his head. "I can't believe I thought you were telling the truth for a second."

LaRusso's still laughing, his head thrown back as his body shakes with the force of it. Johnny can't help but feel a tug of laughter in his own gut simply at the sight.

Bobby's got that kind of infectious laughter too. Always leaves him on the floor with his stomach cramping.

LaRusso eventually stops laughing, still grinning like an idiot when he looks at Johnny.

"Can't believe you thought I was serious, man," LaRusso says, traces of a giggle in his voice. "What, do I seem like the type of guy to hustle people?"

"Wouldn't put it past you, LaRusso," Johnny scoffs, but he's hiding a

grin. Like LaRusso could hustle anyone. He has a terrible poker face. Even with the crane kick he was too obvious.

Johnny honestly can't believe he didn't see it coming. He just thought LaRusso was being weird.

LaRusso shakes his head, giving Johnny a silly grin.

"Damn, guess I should start then," he says, laughing softly. "Man, I had fun tonight. Thanks for this."

LaRusso always thanks him at the end of their outings. It's weird and it leaves Johnny's throat feeling all tight for reasons he can't really name. He knows he feels like he doesn't deserve it, but he doesn't know why he feels that way.

Johnny claps a hand on his shoulder.

"Yeah, no problem, man. C'mon, I'll drive you home."

"Or…you could let me drive."

"No way in hell, LaRusso."

☆

In the twenty-first loop, LaRusso's the one to suggest where they go.

"Deal," LaRusso says, shaking Johnny's hand. "Hey, we should spar somewhere, man. Since, y'know, we're not doing the tournament."

It throws Johnny off.

LaRusso always just asks where they're going and Johnny always just says whatever first comes to mind. He's not sure what's changed.

Johnny opens and closes his mouth a few times before settling on, "Sure, where?"

LaRusso grins, almost sharp.

"I'll give you directions."

It's not the most promising thing Johnny's ever heard, but it's also not the least promising. Plus, he's trying to befriend LaRusso and if this loop changed just slightly, then that must mean he's doing something right. It has to.

Johnny shrugs.

“Okay.”

☆

Johnny doesn’t recognize anything in the area he drives through.

To be fair, he hasn’t been out of Encino a whole lot, but he did grow up around Reseda. He remembers Reseda a little bit. The stillwater pool and the leaky faucets. Johnny still remembers all of it.

Wherever they’re going isn’t near Reseda though. The area’s far more grassy and tree-laden than Reseda ever was.

Johnny pulls the Avanti onto a dirt road, definitely not happy about it. Whatever, his car’ll be fine tomorrow. Not that it makes the idea of dirt on his nice paint job any less aggravating.

“Here we are,” LaRusso says proudly as Johnny drives past an open gate into someone’s yard.

Johnny blinks.

Where the hell are they?

“Is your idea of sparring trespassing?” Johnny asks, mostly to be funny but also just extremely confused.

LaRusso laughs, throwing his head back.

“We’re not trespassing, dude. This is Mr. Miyagi’s place. It’s where I trained for the tournament.”

Johnny glances around the yard, tapping his fingers lightly against the steering wheel.

“I think it’s still trespassing if he doesn’t know we’re here, man,” Johnny says, because he’s done enough stupid things and almost been arrested enough times to know.

LaRusso looks guilty for a second before shrugging.

“Well, he won’t mind,” LaRusso says like that handles anything. “C’mon, park. I gotta show you everything.”

Johnny rolls his eyes but obliges, parking next to a teal car. His car

looks so out of place among the older cars, his car so new and definitely not nearly as shiny as the rest of them.

“Those are pretty nice,” Johnny says, motioning to the other cars in the lot. He can appreciate a cool car, even if the Avanti would win any day of the week.

“Right?” LaRusso says excitedly. “Mr. Miyagi let me have one for my birthday yesterday. Obvious choice was the Ford Super Deluxe. It’s such a nice car, man. Y’know, I had to wax these things as part of my training.”

LaRusso’s grinning fondly at the memory, tracing his fingers along the edge of the Avanti like he’s remembering his own car.

Johnny can only focus on the birthday thing though. He kind of feels bad he didn’t get him a gift even though he didn’t know.

“So is getting your ass kicked like a late birthday present to yourself?” Johnny teases, grinning smugly at LaRusso.

He knows LaRusso can kick his ass, but he kind of enjoys the way LaRusso gets all smug and indignant when Johnny pretends like he doesn’t know that.

The fire of competition lights itself in LaRusso’s eyes, a smirk tugging at his lips.

“Don’t think you’re getting off easy just because we’re not at the tournament,” LaRusso tells him, almost stumbling over himself to climb out of the Avanti. “You’ll see, Johnny.”

Johnny snorts.

“Sure I will.”

☆

Johnny does see.

Sorta.

It feels a lot less like he’s just getting his ass kicked like he did on the beach. It feels more even now. Like Johnny’s learned enough of LaRusso’s moves to keep up with him.

It’s like a dance.

Johnny blocks a punch and goes for a high kick only to be blocked by LaRusso. He can't land a hit on LaRusso and LaRusso can't land one on him.

It's as frustrating as it is exhilarating to know they're on the same level with each other. If they were to team up, they'd probably be unstoppable.

The thought makes Johnny freeze, which is apparently all the time LaRusso needs to send him flying.

Johnny lands in a patch of grass and dirt, staring up at the bright sky. Jesus, this is just like the beach.

Where had that thought even come from? They'd never even get the chance to team up considering the fact they were in opposite dojos with completely opposing methods.

Still, Johnny knew he was right. They'd be completely unstoppable together. Even Kreese wouldn't be able to get past them.

Johnny kind of wishes they could team up.

He's snapped out of his thoughts by LaRusso waving a hand in his face, fingers curled to help him up. He's smirking since he's a bastard who can't help but shove it in Johnny's face every time he gets one over him, but it's soft. Soft the way Johnny's stupidly expensive blankets are soft.

Johnny's cheeks are hot. Probably from the stupidly bright sun.

Johnny rolls his eyes before grabbing onto LaRusso's hand, letting the other haul him to his feet.

He's surprisingly strong for someone so small.

"Think I can call myself the new karate champ?" LaRusso says, shooting him a mischievous smile.

He's insufferable.

"Lucky hit, LaRusso," Johnny scoffs, shaking his head.

It sort of was. If Johnny hadn't gotten distracted, they'd probably still be at a stalemate and engaged in a kind of dance. A karate dance.

Huh, that'd be cool. Not that anyone at the country club would enjoy

the idea of a karate dance as much as Johnny does. Sid would probably kill him.

“Sure,” LaRusso says, a look on his face like he one hundred percent believes he could have kicked Johnny like that if he’d had Johnny’s full attention. “This a lucky hit too?”

LaRusso punches Johnny in the arm lightly, a playful taunt. He’s such a dork.

"Yes," Johnny deadpans, pulling LaRusso into a headlock with ease. "This lucky, LaRusso?"

LaRusso yelps, but he doesn't really fight the headlock. Johnny can tell he's grinning without even looking at him.

"Yeah."

Johnny shoves him to the ground, LaRusso laughing like he's just told the funniest joke in the world. He's so insufferable.

It only makes Johnny smile.

"Hey, I got an idea," LaRusso says once he's done laughing, rolling onto his stomach.

Johnny crosses his arms.

LaRusso’s surprised him this loop. Taking the initiative, making plans before Johnny. Johnny doesn't know what changed, but it has to mean something good.

It doesn't mean Johnny thinks any of LaRusso’s ideas are good though.

"What is it?" Johnny asks, letting judgment seep into his tone.

LaRusso just grins.

"You'll see."

☆

LaRusso's idea turns out to be sharing a stolen bottle of alcohol from Mr. Miyagi.

"Sake," LaRusso calls it, proceeding to take a swig from the bottle and cough his lungs out.

Jesus, he knew LaRusso didn't drink. Why the hell he's trying now is a mystery to Johnny.

Johnny slaps him hard on the back, stealing the bottle out of LaRusso's hands before he wastes perfectly good alcohol by spilling it onto the grass.

"You don't have to drink it, lightweight," Johnny tells him, because they can seriously do something else. Like spar more. Or drive around.

LaRusso shakes his head vehemently, reaching out for the bottle again. Johnny holds it above his head.

At least he can get this over LaRusso.

"No," Johnny says, taking a sip himself. Jeez, LaRusso's a lightweight. This thing is barely alcoholic. "What, get sick of being a goody two shoes?"

He says it mostly to tease, but LaRusso's cheeks flush and he looks away. What the hell?

"I've never been to a high school party," LaRusso admits quietly. Fucking duh. "But you have, I'm guessing. I figured it'd be a good way to – I don't know? Talk to each other? Whatever, it was a stupid idea."

Oh.

LaRusso curls his knees up to his chest, cheeks flushed and head pointed stubbornly at his knees.

Johnny tilts his head back, sighing.

LaRusso's really trying, isn't he? Which means Johnny should probably try too.

Johnny takes another swig from the bottle, shoving it into LaRusso's chest.

"Wha- ?"

"Shut up, LaRusso. Just drink."

LaRusso glares but obliges, pouring some into his mouth. He coughs again, eyes watering but takes another determined sip.

Johnny's almost impressed. At least LaRusso isn't being a pussy about it.

"Who's the lightweight now?" LaRusso coughs out, wiping away a bit of sake that's spilled over his chin.

"Still you, LaRusso," Johnny says, stealing it out of LaRusso's hands so he can take a drink himself. He just knows LaRusso's pouting.

They trade sips back and forth until the bottle's empty and the light in the sky has grown orange. They don't talk, just letting the alcohol take them.

Johnny doesn't know when he got on the ground, but the sky's so pretty. Man, is this why Ali wanted them to go on sunset dates? Shit, this made so much sense.

LaRusso's laying on his back too, head tilted towards the sky. His cheeks are flushed and he's casually picking at handfuls of grass.

Johnny almost snorts. He's probably so drunk. Can barely handle his alcohol. Lightweight.

Johnny can't help but notice how relaxed LaRusso looks. He looks good like that. All warm and lazy like a house cat.

He taps at LaRusso's shin with his shoe. Is he even alive?

LaRusso doesn't respond. He taps harder.

LaRusso's face scrunches up, finally peeking one eye open. Oh so he is alive. That's cool. It'd kind of suck if LaRusso was dead.

"What do you want, Johnny?" LaRusso half-grumbles, half-slurs, the words heavy in his mouth.

Jaaahnny . His accent is so much more prominent now that he's wasted and disgruntled.

Johnny wants to hear him talk more.

He taps his shin even harder.

LaRusso sits up, almost falling over in the process. God, that's hilarious. LaRusso's so funny even when he's not trying to be. Wow, he should tell him that sometime.

"Johnny, hey, knock it off."

Jaaahnny . *Jaaahnny* .

LaRusso's accent is kind of nice to listen to. It's soothing. Had he really found it annoying at some point?

He keeps tapping.

"Johnny, seriously, enough."

LaRusso grabs Johnny's ankle, holding him in place.

Johnny stares.

Heat sears in the place LaRusso holds him, like a brand on his skin. Johnny's cheeks flush for some weird reason. Probably the alcohol.

LaRusso stares at him, big brown eyes gentle and soft. God, LaRusso's so nice. He doesn't even deserve it with the way he's hurt LaRusso. But LaRusso's nice to him anyways. Even though Johnny was never soft or nice with him.

Johnny feels weirdly emotional about it.

"Your face is red, man," LaRusso tells him, eyes wide as he stares at Johnny. "You're fucking…drunk, man."

Johnny frowns.

He doesn't feel drunk. He feels good. Like he could fight someone and win. Fight Kreese and win. Pfft, that'd be cool. Kreese wouldn't even be able to get one over him right now.

Kreese. Shit, he sucks.

Johnny had kind of thought he was cool at first. Badass. He'd kind of been like the dad Johnny never had.

He'd made Johnny stronger. Tougher. Badass.

Johnny barely even cried anymore.

Yet…he'd choked Johnny. Had nearly killed him if it weren't for LaRusso's sensei.

He doesn't really want to think about it. Doesn't want to think about the hands on his throat or how scared he'd felt. Like a wild animal. Like a rabbit in the clutches of a wolf's jaw.

Johnny jumps at the feeling of LaRusso's thumb rubbing circles into his ankle.

"Hey, where'd you go, man?" LaRusso murmurs. He's so close to Johnny's face. "I'm right here, man."

LaRusso has those unfairly big brown eyes. He's got like…sad dog eyes. Johnny has seen those sad eyes on a dog before.

"Jeez, you're drunk," LaRusso says softly, laughing under his breath.

"No," Johnny says, voice quieter than he meant for it to be. "Don't even feel drunk."

"Why's your face all red then?"

"Allergies."

LaRusso stares at him for a bit before he bursts out laughing.

Johnny can't help but start laughing too, throwing his head back.

Jeez, LaRusso's got such an infectious laugh. He should laugh more.

Johnny grabs LaRusso's shirt, because he feels like he may float away with how light his laughter makes him feel. LaRusso slaps Johnny's arm and pretty soon, they're doubled over each other in hysterics.

Johnny has tears streaming down his cheeks by the time he's calmed down, his stomach cramping with it.

LaRusso's mostly calmed down, but he's still giggling a little into Johnny's shoulder.

It doesn't really feel weird that LaRusso's so close to him like maybe it would have if they were sober or if this wasn't the twenty-first time Johnny was living this day.

It's kind of nice honestly.

LaRusso pulls himself back from Johnny's red t-shirt, a silly grin on his face as he stares up at Johnny. His face is golden in the sun, eyes like honey with the light reflecting off of him.

He's beautiful.

LaRusso's grin slips into something softer, warmer. He looks like a dream in this light, a little blurry with how drunk Johnny is.

Johnny's not even thinking when he starts to lean in, hand splayed across LaRusso's side. LaRusso's eyes flutter and he leans in too, chin tilted up and lips falling slack.

"Daniel?"

Johnny jumps about a foot in the air, nearly bashing his head into LaRusso's. Fuck, is that Ali? Shit, Ali! What the hell is she doing here?

LaRusso's eyes are wide, his hands white knuckling the grass around him.

Johnny can't imagine he looks much better.

Johnny looks back at the gate, watching Ali's sweater vest slowly come into view. Her eyebrows are creased, eyes shiny like she was about to start crying. Shit, she looks worried.

Relief floods her face as she spots LaRusso, running over even though he isn't even that far from her. She drops on her knees next to him, pulling him into a hug.

LaRusso's eyes haven't left Johnny's face.

"We didn't know where you were. We looked everywhere for you," Ali says, burying her face in LaRusso's shoulder. She immediately makes a

face. Shit, Johnny's in trouble.

She whips her head in Johnny's direction, glaring. Here they go.

"Were you two drinking? Did Johnny give it to you? I knew you were up to no good! I knew you didn't want to just talk to him! Are you okay, Daniel?"

She doesn't even pause to give them a chance to respond, immediately pulling Daniel's face into her hands. She's so gentle with him, so soft. How does LaRusso stand it?

"Hey, it was my idea," LaRusso says, his fingers curling gently around Ali's wrist. "'M sorry, I know it's stupid. Just thought it would get us… talkin' and stuff."

Ali pauses.

She's probably giving him a soft, pitying look. She used to give it to Johnny all the time whenever he would mention Sid or his mom. Johnny hated that look, but he liked the way she held him after. Like she could soak up the effect of Sid's words if she held on long enough. Not that Sid's words affect him but still, it had been nice.

"Okay," she whispers. And then, louder, "C'mon, let's get you home. Your mom's worried about you."

She pulls him to his feet with ease, LaRusso stumbling into her. He wraps his arms around her waist, his body swaying from side to side.

"Let's go," she murmurs, half dragging LaRusso to the gate.

LaRusso pushes himself away though, half tripping over himself to try and walk back to where Johnny is.

"What about Johnny?" LaRusso asks, words running together. "He can't drive."

Johnny wants to insist that he can actually drive, but he has a feeling neither Ali nor LaRusso will like that.

Ali always got on his case for drinking and judging by the fact LaRusso doesn't want to make him drive, well, he just knows LaRusso would freak.

Johnny waves. Ali frowns.

She clenches and unclenches her fists at her sides, taking a very obvious deep breath.

What's her problem? Johnny knows they aren't on the best terms, but seriously. He's not that bad.

"I'll drive him home," Ali says with a tone that's a little too controlled. "Mr. Miyagi will be here soon. Will you be okay by yourself, Daniel?"

LaRusso collapses back into a sitting position next to Johnny, grinning at Ali. He's so close that his legs are almost pressed to Johnny's, their shoulders brushing.

"Yeah," LaRusso murmurs, grin slipping into something quieter. "Mr. Miyagi's the best, Ali. He's like so awesome."

Johnny nods in agreement, because Mr. Miyagi did save his life once. That was pretty awesome.

Ali nods placatingly, the look on her face unsure. She chews on her lip like she used to do whenever Johnny told her it would be fine if they were a little past curfew.

"Are you sure?" Ali asks, shifting her weight from foot to foot.

"He'll be fine, Ali, jeez," Johnny says, shaking his head.

Mr. Miyagi lives literally in the middle of nowhere. There's no one who's going to try and rob the man. Not to mention the fence all the fucking way around the house. LaRusso's fine.

Ali scoffs at him, crossing her arms.

"Excuse me for caring, Johnny," she spits, saying his name with as much venom as she can manage. "Meet me out front."

She stalks out the gate, leaving Johnny to stare after her.

Johnny sighs.

He lets himself sit quietly for a moment, even though he knows he needs to get out of here and go home. Ali will wait for him, but she won't be happy about it.

He stands up, brushing off his pants and facing LaRusso in the grass.

It's routine. He'll say goodbye to LaRusso and LaRusso will thank him

for hanging out, and Johnny won't feel like he deserves it and then he'll see him on December 19th at the tournament all over again.

Johnny opens his mouth, stopping when he looks at LaRusso.

LaRusso's knees are curled up to his chest and he's chewing on his lip just like Ali does whenever she's not sure or she has something on her mind.

Johnny kicks his knee lightly.

"Spit it out, LaRusso," Johnny says, no heat to his voice. LaRusso's gonna chew his lip in half if he doesn't say whatever the hell he wants to say right now.

LaRusso shifts from side to side, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why'd you and Ali break up?" he asks quietly.

He's looking determinedly away from Johnny, gaze set on the gate.

Not for the first time in this loop, Johnny feels thrown off.

Why does LaRusso want to know? It was barely relevant. They'd broken up long before LaRusso had even arrived in California. Well, a month before but still. Way too long for it to matter.

Johnny supposes he doesn't mind answering though. It doesn't hurt as much as it once did and Johnny's too drunk to even try and hide the truth.

"She didn't like karate," Johnny answers. "Or, she told me she didn't like how I used it. Some bullshit like that."

"Yeah, bullshit," LaRusso murmurs, sounding far away.

The sun is starting to set, a sort of twilight settling over the grassy area. LaRusso's bathed in the half orange, half blue light of the sky. The shadows from the cars are starting to hide his face from Johnny and suddenly he's reminded of the way he could barely even see LaRusso on Halloween save for the light from the street.

He winces.

"Maybe it wasn't all bullshit," Johnny concedes lightly. "Halloween, the beach…"

LaRusso snaps his head towards him.

Johnny swallows.

“I was just trying to show off,” he explains, shoving his hands into his pockets. “You weren’t really a threat. The sucker punch was kind of cool though.”

Johnny only remembers feeling adrenaline and exhilaration. A challenge had arisen and he wasn’t going to back down.

He only feels guilt now.

LaRusso doesn’t even blink, a crooked smile crossing his lips.

“Am I a threat now?” he asks, voice lazy like he’s asking for the time.

Johnny feels like he’s had a bucket of ice water thrown on him.

Was LaRusso a threat? Maybe at the beginning of the loop when the tournament still mattered and he still felt like Ali should have been with him.

Now though? He and LaRusso were…friends? Or they felt more like friends. All Johnny knows is LaRusso feels like a threat in the way Bobby feels like a threat.

In the back of Johnny’s mind, he always knows that Bobby can kick his ass. He just trusts Bobby enough to know that he wouldn’t kick Johnny’s ass unless he deserves it. Or unless they were sparring or competing against each other.

That’s how it feels with LaRusso too.

So, no, LaRusso’s not a threat. At least not in the way he was at the beginning of the loop. Not in the way where Johnny’s constantly on edge around him.

He’s more of a quiet threat. Like when Johnny sees a dog and acknowledges that it could attack him but never thinks it will.

“No,” Johnny whispers. “You’re not.”

LaRusso grins.

“You’re not either, Johnny.”

Somehow, it doesn't feel like an insult. Somehow, he knows that LaRusso feels the exact same way Johnny does.

☆

Ali doesn't talk to him when he gets in the car and she refuses to talk to him for most of the drive.

Johnny wants to talk though. He's always been a talkative drunk, but it's mostly because he's kind of hyper aware of the fact that he almost kissed Ali's boyfriend. With Ali so close to him, it's kind of hard to think of anything but.

He doesn't even know why he did it. Maybe because LaRusso had looked pretty. Maybe because he'd been too drunk to control his impulses. Maybe because he'd been riding the high of laughing his ass off seconds before.

The thing is…LaRusso had leaned in too. He was going to kiss Johnny back.

Jesus, he might have seriously kissed LaRusso tonight if Ali hadn't shown up.

"I almost kissed LaRusso," Johnny blurts, because he doesn't have much of a filter usually but especially when he's drunk.

"What?" Ali asks loudly, voice almost a screech. She whips her head around to look at Johnny, eyes wide. "Johnny, what?"

He's kind of lucky they're stopped at a red light or Ali definitely would have fucked up his car by slamming on the brakes.

Johnny knows he should have kept his mouth shut, but it's too late now.

"I almost kissed LaRusso," he says again, mostly because he can't quite believe it himself. "I don't know. He just looked pretty and I'm…I'm so fucking drunk, Ali. Fuck."

Ali just stares at him for a moment before she sighs.

"We're not talking about this in the car," she decides. "You want ice cream?"

What?

Screw it, yeah, he does want ice cream.

“Yeah.”

☆

The cashier definitely knows Johnny’s drunk based on the judgy ass look he gives Johnny, but Johnny doesn’t give a shit. He’s getting strawberry ice cream and he doesn’t care who’s going to judge him for being drunk while doing it.

The problem is one of those people is probably Ali, who looks ready to kill him when he almost spills it all over the floor. Shit, he should sit down.

Johnny slides into a booth seat and Ali slides in across from him, fingers wrapped around her waffle cone. She always gets vanilla ice cream even though it’s the worst.

They eat in silence for a few minutes, Johnny trying not to spill strawberry all over his shirt while Ali takes small bites of her cone.

Ali slams a hand on the table, making a face when Johnny looks up at her.

“What?” Johnny says around a mouthful of ice cream.

“What?” Ali hisses. “What do you mean *what* ? You almost kissed my boyfriend!”

Oh, right, that’s what they came here to talk about.

“Sorry,” Johnny murmurs, tapping his spoon against the cup. “I… don’t know what got into me.”

Ali stares at him again, brows furrowed.

“Do you have a crush on him?” Ali asks softly, staring down at the ice cream that’s dripping down her fingers.

Johnny almost spits out his ice cream.

Fuck, what? No, of course he doesn’t have a crush on LaRusso. Why would he have a crush on LaRusso of all people?

Sure, LaRusso was funny when he wasn’t being obnoxious and beautiful in the sunlight, but that didn’t mean anything. And yeah,

LaRusso was an excellent fighter who can kick Johnny's ass and Johnny kind of wanted to hear him say his name all day in that Jersey accent but still. And it's true that if he were to team up with LaRusso, they'd be unstoppable and that very thought makes Johnny's stomach flutter. And he and LaRusso probably totally would have kissed if Ali hadn't walked in and LaRusso's lips looked so soft and-

Johnny presses his forehead to the table.

Fuck, he totally does, doesn't he?

When had that fucking happened? Had it been after Golf N' Stuff? Had it been before? Had it happened even before the time loop?

"Fuuuck," Johnny groans.

"Oh Johnny," Ali says, sounding sympathetic but awkward. Johnny feels Ali's hand wrap around his forearm, giving it a light squeeze.

He can't believe his ex is comforting him about having a crush on *her* boyfriend and that he only realized he had one once he got stuck in a fucking time loop. What is his fucking life?

Neither of them speak for a moment.

Ali sighs.

"Y'know, I think…I kind of figured you might have had a crush on him," Ali says quietly, trying to sound casual and failing.

Johnny lifts his head up from the table so fast that he hurts his nose, staring at Ali.

What?

"What?" Johnny says aloud.

Ali refuses to look at him, looking determinedly out the window. Her cheeks are a little flushed, hand wrapped so tightly around her ice cream cone that Johnny's almost worried she's going to break it in half.

"It was like you were trying to make *him* jealous," Ali tells him. "Not win me over or anything. You were just competing with each other."

Johnny can't help but stare wide-eyed at Ali.

Holy shit.

Holy shit .

Was that how it had looked? Like Johnny had a crush on LaRusso with how often he challenged him? He was just trying to bother the little bastard but shit…

And shit, okay, maybe some part of it was always about LaRusso. Maybe even when he wanted Ali's attention, he also wanted LaRusso's. And sure, he had wanted the negative attention from LaRusso but now?

Shit, now Johnny wanted to kiss him.

Fuck.

"Damn it," Johnny groans, dropping his forehead back to the table. "I can't believe I didn't notice before."

"You always were a little oblivious."

"Shut up."

"Shut up," Ali repeats in a mocking tone.

They sit quietly once more.

Ali rubs circles into his wrist with her thumb. Johnny can't help but admit it's kind of comforting.

"What am I gonna do?" Johnny mumbles eventually. "You like him, Ali."

"Yeah," Ali murmurs. "But you two deserve each other."

Johnny lifts his head. "What do you mean?"

Ali shrugs, eyes set on the table now.

"You both compete like you're going to die if you don't do it every single second, you both like the same bands, and you're both stubborn as hell."

"LaRusso doesn't like Black Sabbath."

"Is that what you got out of what I said?"

Johnny sighs. Ali never lets him get away with trying to distract her. Johnny both hates it and loves it about her.

“No, jeez,” he grumbles. “What about you? I mean, this has to suck.”

“I don’t know. Probably gonna take some time to work on myself and not have a thing for idiots who like karate,” she replies, giving him a small smile.

“Ha ha,” Johnny deadpans, rolling his eyes even though he agrees it’s kind of weird it happened twice.

They finish their ice cream in silence and drive home the same way.

Johnny can’t help but replay the past few months in his head.

He really hadn’t tried to win Ali over in any way, huh? He’d just… competed with LaRusso. Hurt him like it would make Ali look at him as a hero. She hated fighting, always had. Maybe it really had always been about LaRusso.

Johnny reaches for the door almost immediately when they get to his house. He’s so tired. And drunk. He needs to get to fucking bed.

“Y’know,” Ali says, stopping him. “I don’t know how much I believed the time loop stuff, but…you really have changed. I…thank you, Johnny.”

Johnny doesn’t know what she’s thanking him for, but he nods anyway. He’s not even embarrassed that more people are starting to notice the change. This loop changed just like he did, which means he’s this much closer to getting out. He’s glad.

He steps out of the Avanti, shutting the door.

“What about your car?” Ali asks, motioning to the interior. “I can’t just keep it, Johnny.”

Oh, right, his car.

He shrugs.

“Take it home.”

Ali gives him a surprised look before she laughs.

“Alright,” she says, sounding a little too pleased. She better not crash

it. It'll be here tomorrow, but his baby better stay intact. "See you tomorrow, Johnny."

"See ya."

☆

Johnny doesn't actually come back to the tournament until the twenty-fourth loop.

He knows it's stupid, but he feels like somehow LaRusso's going to remember the way they almost kissed and act all awkward about it. He feels more awkward having to talk to Ali.

He knows she said that they deserved each other, but there is no way she doesn't like LaRusso. She's like his savior. Like Prince Charming or something.

She looks at him with so much love. She looks at him like she used to look at Johnny. And LaRusso looks at her like he doesn't ever want to look away. It's gross but true.

Johnny doesn't feel like deserves to have LaRusso look at him like that. It's better to just leave it alone.

He can still be friends with LaRusso, obviously. Befriending LaRusso was kind of the goal in the first place. He'll take him somewhere fun so they can talk and Johnny doesn't even have to think about his feelings. It's perfect.

Only his plan is kind of ruined because he loses track of the time and shows up way too fucking late. Jesus, it shouldn't even be legal for tournaments to start this early.

He dresses as fast as he can before running off to where he sort of remembers they were supposed to start. Fuck, it's been way too long since he actually competed.

Bobby's giving him this scrutinizing look when Johnny lines up next to him. Johnny's just glad he's taller than him so he doesn't have to look at him.

"Mr. Lawrence."

Johnny doesn't jump, but it's a near thing.

Johnny can admit he's sick of feeling like a rabbit around Kreese, but

his fear always wins out. He doesn't know what it is. He just knows that every time he's been around Kreese since that first loop, his chest feels tight and his heart starts beating really fast.

Badumpbadumpbadump .

Like a rabbit thumping its paws against the ground.

Something like panic wells up in his throat, reminding him all too well of how it felt to gasp for air with Kreese's arm against his throat.

Pathetic.

"Yes, sensei," Johnny says, more on instinct than anything else.

Kreese steps in front of him.

Johnny always forgets that Kreese is barely taller than him. Probably because he uses that miniscule height difference to his advantage, always making Johnny feel smaller, lesser.

"Glad to see you showed up," Kreese tells him. That can't be all he has to say. "Next time set an alarm. You won't get another chance."

That's more what Johnny expected.

His heart hammers away in his chest, trying its best to leap out of Johnny's throat.

Johnny swallows.

"Yes, sensei," he replies, hoping it doesn't come out as choked as he feels.

Kreese gives him an assessing look, which means Johnny must have sounded like someone was slowly squeezing their hands around his throat.

Kreese has eyes so blue they're almost gray that drag Johnny in. Like a storm. Like a tsunami. Like a current. Johnny feels a mix of fear and apprehension whenever Kreese looks at him now.

He knows he must have used to feel respect for Kreese instead of fear. He must have, right? He couldn't have possibly stayed just because he was too much of a pussy to walk out of there.

(Walking out would have made him a pussy too.

Staying and feeling fear made him a pussy, but walking out would have made him an even bigger pussy.

He feels like a kicked dog let out of its cage. Staying gets him kicked, leaving him gets him kicked.

Johnny knows Kreese will find him even if he does leave. Johnny's too good of a fighter for Kreese to just let him go.)

Kreese walks away, leaving Johnny feeling like a puppet with its strings cut.

His heart refuses to calm down. God, he's so pathetic. He's scared of Kreese of all people.

He needs to get it together since he's actually competing in the All-Valley now.

☆

Johnny doesn't even remember winning any of his matches.

He feels too keyed up, his hands shaking and sweating at the end of his matches.

He feels wrong, like his mind isn't attached to the rest of his body. He doesn't know what it is, but it's fucking stupid and it needs to stop.

Bobby keeps shooting him these concerned looks that only aggravate Johnny. Jesus, he's fucking fine. He doesn't know what the fuck is going on, but he doesn't need Bobby's fucking concern right now.

He's fine, okay? Jeez.

He's going to lose to LaRusso and talk to him after so they can be friends and Johnny's not going to think about kissing him and-

"Bobby."

Fuck, no, already?

Johnny forgot how much Kreese wanted LaRusso out of the tournament. It's been way too long.

He waits for them to finish, grabbing onto Bobby's gi almost immediately.

Fuck, he can't even get a good grip because his hands are shaking. Is he sick? What the hell is happening?

"Bobby," Johnny rasps, needing him to turn around. He can't hurt LaRusso. Not again. Not after everything Johnny has worked for.

Bobby whips around to look at him, eyes filled with concern and fuck, no, Bobby should be focused on his match. He doesn't need to worry about Johnny, he doesn't need-

"Johnny," Bobby says, stepping barely out of Johnny's grip.

Johnny feels sort of like he's lost something, fingers grasping around air. Fuck, fuck, fuck. Bobby, he can't-

Bobby gives him a nod and Johnny feels some sort of reprieve flood his system.

It doesn't stop his heart from beating like it's going to jump out of his chest or stop his hands from shaking, but he feels less like something might attack him.

Bobby doesn't injure LaRusso.

Johnny thinks that's probably good for the loop.

Johnny feels a little bit like a wild animal as he steps up to face LaRusso. His hands tremor as he forms them into fists.

Johnny doesn't quite feel attached to his body again once the fight begins.

It's weird. It's like he's watching himself perform the movements without actually consciously doing them.

He comes back to himself a little when he gets a hit on LaRusso.

What?

LaRusso stares at him wide eyed, holding a hand to his stomach and looking just as surprised as Johnny feels.

LaRusso's supposed to get the first hit. LaRusso always gets the first hit. What changed?

"Point, Lawrence!"

Johnny returns to his place on the mat, more confused than anything.

Johnny gets a second hit on LaRusso with a chop to the side. And then a third with a kick to his stomach.

LaRusso falls back on his elbows, staring up at Johnny.

He's…won?

It doesn't quite feel like it. It feels wrong more than it feels like anything else.

The guys surround Johnny, shaking his shoulders and yelling in his ear. Kreese's hand lands on his shoulder, praise in his ear.

All Johnny can do is watch LaRusso.

He stares at Johnny with this look of disbelief and fear and anger. He's looking at Johnny like he did when he first came into Cobra Kai, an almost snarl.

(" *I know it doesn't matter to you, but it's open season on me if I lose. I just…I can't just leave,* " LaRusso had told him that sixteenth loop.

Johnny's going to throw up.)

☆

Johnny throws up on the side of the building after he gets changed and the guys finish congratulating him in the locker room. Bobby had given him this fake smile, eyes still full of concern as he slapped Johnny's shoulder.

Jesus, he'd been seriously fucked up today. It'd felt like a bad high or the way he used to feel around Sid as a kid. It was pathetic.

Johnny wipes his mouth when he's done, not even caring that he's ruining his jacket. It'll be here tomorrow.

Johnny freezes.

Will there even be a tomorrow? He won, after all. And he spent a lot of time befriending LaRusso these last few loops.

Shit, LaRusso.

He needs to explain or something. He wasn't supposed to win. It

wasn't supposed to happen like this.

"Yeah, I know, I'm starving."

LaRusso is still here. Thank God.

Johnny creeps around the corner, watching LaRusso walk with his sensei out to the parking lot.

(Johnny feels a little bit like there's an arm resting against his throat whenever he looks at that parking lot.

He swallows.)

"LaRusso," he calls out, jogging over. "Hey, wait up, man."

LaRusso tenses, his shoulders doing that thing cats do when they're pissed.

"What," LaRusso says through gritted teeth, not turning to face Johnny.

Johnny opens and closes his mouth.

Shit, he's never had to do it like this before. He's always been able to catch LaRusso and explain the time loop. And there's a lot of people around.

"Uh, I need to tell you something," Johnny says, shifting his weight from one leg to the other. "Preferably alone?"

LaRusso laughs harshly.

The fuck?

"What's-"

"What do you want, man?" LaRusso asks, finally turning to face him. "Jesus, man, you won. Congratulations. You tryin' to start shit early? Couldn't even wait a day to start tormenting me, could you?"

LaRusso's seething, teeth bared like an animal. He clutches his second place trophy, the other curled into a fist by his side.

There's a crowd forming around them.

"Hey, no," Johnny says, taking a miniscule step back. This is probably

bad, right? “I just wanted to-”

“To what? Shove your win in my face?” LaRusso growls. “Well? Spit it out, Lawrence.”

Johnny’s trapped. Between the crowd surrounding them and LaRusso in front of him and Mr. Miyagi right next to him, there’s nowhere to go.

LaRusso drops his trophy onto the asphalt, the top breaking off. Johnny’s reminded of his own broken second place trophy, stuck somewhere in the first loop.

LaRusso shoves him.

Johnny’s not really expecting it, stumbling back into the crowd. Someone shoves him back in, sending him flying into LaRusso.

Shit, this is getting out of hand.

Mr. Miyagi is saying something, but LaRusso isn’t listening, all his attention on Johnny.

It’s exhilarating to have LaRusso’s eyes on him. Johnny wishes it was under different circumstances.

Daniel shoves him back again, punching him in the side and fuck, that hurts.

“Get him, Johnny!” someone yells.

“Beat his ass, Daniel!” another person yells.

Fuck, this is getting out of hand. All he wanted to do was fucking talk to LaRusso. Why does it always fucking end up like this?

“Stop,” Johnny hisses, catching LaRusso’s wrist in his hand when another punch comes flying his way. “I don’t want to fucking fight, dude.”

“What, too much of a pussy?” LaRusso mocks, kicking Johnny back. “When did I ever get a choice, huh? I didn’t choose to be in the tournament! I didn’t choose to fight you! You’re the one who started all this bullshit!”

Johnny pauses.

When he puts it like that, it sort of makes sense. LaRusso didn't choose to be in the tournament. Not in the way Johnny did, at least. Not in the way the rest of the cobras did.

Johnny wishes he could just tell LaRusso that he knows that, but it's too suspicious and he's not trying to get put in a government facility.

"LaRusso-" Johnny starts, but LaRusso doesn't let him finish.

"Shut up," LaRusso snaps. "We're not fucking friends. We'll never be friends."

Johnny feels like he's been struck.

He stands still, feeling like the rest of the world has stopped too. It's just him, LaRusso, and the tightness in his throat.

Christ, is that how LaRusso felt? Is that why he wasn't out of the loop yet? Because LaRusso was just fucking pretending? Because he knew they could never really be fucking friends?

Jesus, and Johnny was stupid enough to have a crush on him.

"Fuck you, LaRusso," Johnny chokes out, because he can't make himself say anything else. Because really, fuck LaRusso for fucking with him for seven fucking loops. Fuck him.

Johnny storms off, pushing through the crowd. He ignores the shouts at his back, ignores LaRusso's stupid Jersey accent above the rest.

Fuck him. He can go fuck himself.

Johnny doesn't fucking need him.

He decides to walk home, because who fucking cares? He's going to wake up tomorrow in his freezing cold bed with Sid yelling outside the window, and it won't fucking matter. He's never getting out of here.

Johnny only realizes he's crying once he realizes the sidewalk isn't supposed to be that fucking blurry.

Fuck, he's so pathetic.

Liking LaRusso, getting stuck in a time loop, letting himself be this fucking affected.

He falls to his knees on the corner of some middle of nowhere street, letting himself sob. He's stuck. He's fucking stuck.

He punches the ground.

Pain reverberates through his knuckles. Johnny's probably broken a bone.

He doesn't even care.

He hits the ground over and over and over until his hands are bleeding and shaking. Is this what he has to do? Punish himself? Show whatever fucked up part of the universe that put him here how sorry he is?

Why fucking him? Why not LaRusso? Why not Kreese? Why not someone who fucking deserves it more than he does?

Johnny punches the ground.

He lets out a guttural scream into the night. From pain or frustration, he can't really tell. All he knows is he's fucking stuck and it fucking sucks and he's never getting out of here.

Fucking never.

☆

Johnny spends the next five loops drunk and half-blind.

All he has to do is park his car down the street and head back to his room, and he's clear to spend his time sneaking alcohol from the wine cellar. Not like Sid fucking cares anyway.

Johnny doesn't fucking care either.

It kind of feels good to get lost in the alcohol and fuzziness that comes with it. He's missed the feelings that came with being drunk. He never has to think about school or Sid or karate. He can just lay in his bed and let the alcohol wash over him.

In the thirtieth loop, Johnny decides to take the wine with him.

He ends up just driving around until the wine bottle is empty, only pulling off the road when he thinks he's going to throw up. Stupid weak stomach.

Johnny ends up at some park, wine bottle half empty beside him.

Stupid LaRusso is probably losing the All-Valley right now, but at least it's not to him and his stupid fists.

God, he's tired. He's tired of the fucking loop and fucking LaRusso.

And he's exhausted. He feels like he hasn't actually slept in so long. He's slept, but it feels like a chore. He hates this.

Maybe if he takes a nap on the grass he'll feel better.

Yeah, probably. Not like it can get any worse.

☆

Johnny wakes up to the sound of someone talking.

He must still be drunk, because he swears he hears LaRusso. That and the room is fucking spinning.

He groans, throwing an arm over his face.

"Jesus!" Yeah, that's definitely LaRusso. "Jeez, you scared me, man."

Where the fuck is he?

He's clearly laying on some type of bed since his back doesn't hurt. LaRusso's house?

He peeks through his arm to stare up at the ceiling. Reseda apartments don't look like this. No, this shit looks like an actual house.

"Did you kidnap me, LaRusso?" he slurs, tongue heavy in his mouth. "Woulda just come if you'd asked."

LaRusso makes a huffy noise.

Johnny smirks.

LaRusso is way too easy to mess with.

"No, you asshole," LaRusso tells him, an exasperated undercurrent to his voice. "You were passed out in a park in the middle of nowhere stinking of booze! We were- I was- we couldn't just leave you there!"

Johnny rolls his head to the side, looking lazily up at LaRusso. He's

not looking at Johnny, face screwed up in something like frustration with his hands clenched at his sides.

He's so dramatic.

Johnny's fine. He's passed out in random places before, sheesh.

What the fuck does LaRusso care anyways? They're not friends. They can never fucking be friends. LaRusso doesn't even want them to be friends, because he's an asshole.

"What do you care?" Johnny asks, glaring at LaRusso. "We're not friends."

LaRusso stares slack jawed at him.

Oh, like he has any right to be surprised. Johnny's just giving him a taste of his own medicine.

"I was doing what any fucking sane person would do when they see someone passed out on the side of the road!" LaRusso nearly yells, his face getting red. Oh, he's pissed. "I was worried you might be dead or something!"

Johnny feels the start of something like rage boiling in his blood.

"So I'm a charity case, LaRusso?" Johnny snarls, lifting himself onto his elbows. "Is that it? You thought you could fucking save me?"

LaRusso stares at him, pale.

Oh, he fucking got him. So that's what this has been about. LaRusso didn't even want to try to be friends with him. He just wanted to play hero and save Johnny.

Johnny laughs, tilting his head forward.

He's such an idiot. He couldn't tell even though it was right in front of him the whole time. Just like his stupid ass crush.

"Johnny-"

"Oh, shut up, LaRusso. God, you just never stop talking, do you?" Johnny shakes his head. "I don't fucking need you to save me, man. I'm not some chick."

Johnny forces himself up from the bed, the world tilting sideways

immediately. Fuck, how drunk is he?

Johnny accepts his fate, figuring he probably won't even feel the fall with how drunk he is anyways.

Johnny feels a pair of arms under his before he's being slowly lowered to his knees. Of fucking course LaRusso had to save him again. He just can't leave well enough alone.

LaRusso stares down at him, big brown eyes glaring at him. Johnny still sees the hurt behind that angry expression, one he's seen on himself more times than he can count these past thirty days.

"You needed me to save you just now," LaRusso points out and fuck him, seriously.

"Shut up," Johnny spits. "Let go, asshole."

But LaRusso doesn't let go, because fucking of course he doesn't.

He just brings Johnny slowly back to his feet, gently like Johnny is going to break. Johnny wants to bite him, not unlike a feral dog.

Johnny wrenches himself from LaRusso's grasp, stumbling back into the bed. He's too drunk to even leave, great.

"Johnny, just-" LaRusso makes a frustrated noise. "Just stay here, man. You can't even walk."

Johnny could walk if he really wanted to. He could walk all the way to fucking Nebraska right now if he chose to.

But he is tired. And even though he fucking hates LaRusso right now, the bed is nice.

He settles onto his back, facing away from LaRusso.

"I really hate you, man," he murmurs, clutching the bed sheet.

"Yeah, I know," LaRusso responds quietly. "I know."

Silence settles over the room, thick and uncomfortable.

Johnny refuses to take it back though. He does hate LaRusso. He hates how he has to think he's Johnny's savior just to be around him.

Johnny decides to sleep. Not like his relationship with LaRusso can get

any worse.

He's almost asleep when he feels fingers running through his hair. Fucking LaRusso.

If Johnny was less drunk or tired, he might make some comment about his hair being irresistible or tell LaRusso to fuck off. He's both though and it actually feels kind of nice. Feels like when Ali used to run her fingers through his hair after a long day.

And hey, he actually misses those days when he could just sit and talk with Ali, so he lets it slide. Maybe it's LaRusso's way of apologizing, not that Johnny accepts it.

Johnny drifts into sleep rather easily after that, not even remembering when he finally falls asleep.

☆

Johnny loses track of the loops after that.

He refuses to come back to the tournament. He refuses to be a charity case, a pet that LaRusso can rescue. He's not doing it.

He's not some pitbull abandoned by its owner. He's almost an adult who doesn't need someone like LaRusso to save him. Someone like LaRusso to step in when shit gets bad.

He spends most of the loops drinking, driving, and drinking and driving. He doesn't even care where he goes, he just can't be around LaRusso.

Johnny's actually sober one night when he's driving around, bottle of whiskey shoved into the glove compartment to drink later.

He doesn't even notice the familiar Mercedes pull up next to him, too busy cursing out the red light that refuses to fucking turn green under his breath.

"Johnny!"

Johnny puts his head against his steering wheel.

People in his life just keep finding him even when he doesn't want them to, huh?

He looks up, because he knows he has to or Bobby will throw

something at him. Bobby's leaning over the side of his car, eyes filled with concern and brows drawn together. Tommy's in his passenger seat with his feet up on the dash, seeming surprised and pissed at the same time.

"Hey," Johnny mumbles, nodding at them. He tightens his grip on the steering wheel.

"Hey, man, where were you today?" Bobby asks, tilting his head. "Did you forget or something, man?"

No, of course Johnny didn't fucking forget about the tournament. It's been the only thing on his mind for the past forty days or so. How could he fucking forget?

Johnny shrugs.

"Didn't feel like it," Johnny answers. It's the truth. He's too fucking tired to compete again. He knows what happens when he wins and he knows what happens when he loses. None of it makes a difference for this fucking time loop.

Bobby's face scrunches up and Tommy slams his foot into the dash.

Jesus, what's his problem?

"Hey, watch it, man!" Bobby tells him, alarmed. "Don't fuck up my car."

"It's bullshit!" Tommy yells, waving his hands in the air wildly. "Didn't fucking feel like it? Bullshit! We lost today because he wasn't there, man!"

"That's not why we lost," Bobby says, voice dangerously calm.

"Come on, Bobby! We could have won if Johnny was there and you know it!"

Johnny feels frustration creep up inside of him, annoyance coursing through his veins. He knows they fucking couldn't have because he's lived it at least forty times by this point. He would have lost to LaRusso anyways, so who gives a shit if he shows up or not?

Bobby's hands clench and unclench the steering wheel like he's five seconds away from kicking Tommy's ass in the middle of the street.

Johnny doesn't want to deal with this today.

“Guys-” he starts, cut off by someone slamming their hand on the horn. Asshole.

He turns around to flip them off, making sure to wave it around so they sit at the stoplight even longer. Play stupid games, win stupid prizes, motherfucker.

Johnny only presses the gas when they raise their hand to beep at him again, speeding off in the direction of his house. Hopefully he’s seen the last of Bobby and Tommy for this loop. He doesn’t need to deal with Bobby’s concern or Tommy’s bullshit.

Jesus, he’s fine. He’s sick of people trying to coddle him. He’s not some helpless little bunny that’s been abandoned by its mother.

Bobby’s not the type to leave someone alone though. Not when he thinks there’s something wrong. Not when he thinks he should push instead of pull.

Johnny catches sight of Bobby’s shitty little Mercedes in his rearview mirror, groaning. He’s not escaping this talk and he knows it. Bobby would probably stand outside his house until the loop resets anyways, so Johnny might as well get it over with.

Johnny pulls off into a gas station, feeling like he’s being pulled over. It’s just Bobby, but the same type of apprehension is there.

He climbs out of the Avanti, leaning against the door. He really wishes he brought his cigs instead of the whiskey right now. He needs something to do with his hands.

Bobby pulls in behind him, Tommy looking more anxious to get out than Bobby does.

Tommy wastes no time, immediately storming over to Johnny as soon as Bobby stops the car. What the hell is his problem?

He grabs Johnny by the front of his jacket, yanking him down to his eye level.

Tommy's face is red, teeth bared like he's going to go for Johnny’s throat.

Johnny swallows.

"The fuck, man," Johnny says, confused and on edge. "What the hell is

your deal?"

"My deal?" Tommy asks incredulously, giving Johnny's jacket another harsh yank. "You don't show up to the fucking tournament, we fucking lose, and you're asking what's *my* fucking deal?"

Johnny grits his teeth.

"I told you," Johnny bites out. "I didn't feel like it."

"Bullshit!" Tommy yells, shaking Johnny by his jacket. Asshole. "You're fucking king karate, man!"

Johnny sneers.

Johnny's barely seen Tommy for forty fucking days. He's so sick of losing. He's sick of karate. He's sick of LaRusso. He's sick of it all.

He shoves Tommy back, glaring.

"Shut the fuck up, man," Johnny growls, brushing off his jacket unnecessarily. “Just fuck off! Seriously, man.”

Tommy’s eyes are wide, filled with incredulity. His hands shake by his sides, fingers twitching into fists.

“What the fuck, man!” Tommy yells, eyes narrowing as he glares right back at Johnny. “I didn’t even fucking do anything!”

Johnny…well, Johnny actually can’t say anything to that. He’s too pissed off and he doesn’t actually need to fucking explain himself. Not to fucking Tommy, not to fucking anyone.

“Fuck off, man.”

“No, not fuck off!” Tommy’s shaking with anger, body taut. “You’re being a dick!”

Johnny rolls his eyes.

Oh who gives a fuck? None of it matters, because at the end of the day it’s still going to be December 19th when Johnny wakes up tomorrow.

Tommy levels a look at him.

Johnny already knows what it means. He’s seen that look in Tommy’s

eyes before.

He's going to fight Johnny.

Johnny welcomes it.

Tommy rushes at him, tackling Johnny around the waist into the pavement. Johnny doesn't even brace himself, wanting it to hurt like it always does after a good fight. He wants it to leave a fucking mark or something. He wants to wake up with bruises, scratches. Proof that he fucking fought, proof that he didn't let himself just lie there like roadkill.

The pavement scratches up Johnny's back, angry and burning. Johnny feels the way he hits his head off the asphalt in his teeth.

He's fucking missed this. The pure anger and rage. The blood and bruises of a fight where doesn't have to worry about stupid fucking rules.

Tommy rears his fist back and Johnny takes the opportunity to knock his head into Tommy's. It only sort of hurts, more like a slight headache than anything. It's not enough.

Tommy falls back, sitting at Johnny's feet with his hands clutching his forehead. He looks pissed. Fucking good.

Johnny vaults himself up and over Tommy, going for a punch. He feels wild with adrenaline, not quite himself. He can barely even fucking see with his hair in his face, reminding him all too well of his fight with LaRusso.

Johnny puts that memory into his fist as he throws it.

Tommy's head whips to the side.

Johnny's knuckles fucking hurt.

Tommy reaches a hand up to cup his face, slowly turning back to face Johnny like he can't believe Johnny just did that. Johnny honestly can't believe he did it either, but he's never fought Tommy like this before.

Johnny can see how Tommy's cheek is cut open as he pulls his hand away, smearing blood across his face and fingers. If he felt less like a feral animal right now, Johnny might regret it.

“What the fuck!” Tommy yells, shoving at Johnny’s chest. “What the fuck is your problem!”

The shove snaps Johnny out of it a little, but he still feels the way rage boils in his blood because seriously, fuck Tommy for thinking Johnny owes him fucking anything.

Johnny’s fucking problem is he’s stuck in a time loop and he’s been stuck here for over forty fucking days. He doesn’t need to fucking explain himself every goddamn time. He doesn’t need Bobby to look at him with pity or…well, he doesn’t know how Tommy will react, but he doesn’t need it.

He doesn’t need their pity or kind words or fucking anything. He can handle himself.

Johnny shoves him back, which in turn just turns into a shoving match between them. Johnny pulls back to punch Tommy again if only to stop the stupid fucking shoving so it can be a real fight again, but he never gets the chance.

A pair of hands haul him off Tommy. Johnny fights them for a bit but realizes it’s useless, because it’s Bobby. Bobby’s too fucking strong to not be able to hold Johnny even when he’s thrashing.

Tommy jumps to his feet, practically vibrating with anger.

“I didn’t fucking do anything!” Tommy yells, nearly hysterical. Blood drips down his cheek onto his shirt, staining the gray material. “I didn’t do anything, man!”

Johnny wants to laugh.

Tommy’s the one who started the fucking fight with him. Tommy’s the one who just had to keep fucking pushing. Tommy’s the-

“He’s right, man,” Bobby says, interrupting Johnny’s thoughts. “He didn’t actually do anything.”

What?

“What?” Johnny says, wishing he wasn’t stuck so he could actually face Bobby. “Of course he did! He’s the one who started the fight!”

He feels the way Bobby shakes his head behind him.

“Not what I’m talking about,” Bobby tells him, sighing. “Yeah, he was

being a dick. You both were. But you never actually explained yourself, man. Why didn't you show up to the tournament?"

Fucking this again.

"I already told you-"

"Yeah, yeah, you didn't feel like it," Bobby says, sounding tired. Asshole didn't even give him a chance to finish talking. "Why?"

Johnny's vibrating with anger at this point.

"Just shut the fuck up, man!" Johnny snaps, driving the heel of his Chuck into the toe of Bobby's sneaker. "Leave me the fuck alone!"

Bobby lets go almost immediately, making a muffled noise of pain.

Johnny glares at both of them before storming off towards the Avanti.

He's fucking out of here. He's not going to explain himself ever again. It's not like they could fucking help him anyways.

☆

Johnny keeps getting into fights after that. He picks fights with people bigger than him or people who look to be his age.

He wants fighting to feel like something. He wants it to hurt, he wants bruises on his cheeks, he wants blood dripping down his chin.

Sometimes he's drunk, sometimes he's not. He prefers to be sober when he fights. It hurts more when he's sober.

He likes the bruises he has to nurse. Likes the cuts he has to patch up. It gives him proof that he's a fighter, that he's not just stuck here because he couldn't punch his way out.

He takes it too far one night. He wants to say it's the forty-eighth loop, but he's not quite sure.

It'd been a fight with some bigger guy outside a bar. At least a good five inches taller than Johnny with definitely way more muscle than him.

He'd kicked the shit out of Johnny. Bruised his face, his ribs.

Johnny's spitting out blood as he climbs into the Avanti, his interior

stained red. Jesus, that's gonna be a bitch to get out.

God, his ribs and chest hurt. He doesn't know if the wheezing breaths are a bad sign or not. Probably. Fuck.

Some of his teeth feel loose. Fuck, how hard did that guy punch him?

He's never fought like this before. Never had injuries like this before. It's exciting. It makes him feel like he might be dying.

Johnny doesn't want to go home. He can't patch this shit up by himself.

The problem is he doesn't know where he should go. He can't go to Bobby or Tommy. He can't go to LaRusso. He probably shouldn't go to Jimmy or Dutch either, the protective fuckers. Ali would freak out if he came over.

Fuck. Is there anyone who could…? Should Johnny go home?

Johnny presses his forehead to his steering wheel.

There is one person. Fuck, is he really going to…?

He sighs.

Damn it. Yeah, he is.

☆

Johnny ends up outside of Susan's house at close to 9 o'clock at night.

Johnny doesn't talk to Susan, but he knows she goes to punk concerts. They mosh and shit at those, right? She has to know how to patch up a few cuts. Maybe not the ribs but definitely the cuts.

Susan definitely didn't like him even when he and Ali were dating. She always stuck her nose up at him, always had something to say about him.

He's not really sure why he chose her house of all places, but he's here and he's in fucking pain.

He gives the door three quick bangs before he goes back to clutching his side. Speeding with fucked up ribs probably wasn't the best idea.

Johnny only has to wait a few seconds before the door is being

wrenched open, Susan standing there with an unimpressed look on her face. She's clearly wearing pajamas, but she probably wasn't trying to fall asleep judging by the fact that she got to the door so quick.

"What the hell are you doing here?" she asks, tone unamused. She crosses her arms over her chest. "And why do you look like that? You weren't even at the tournament today."

Leave it to Suze to act all bitchy even when Johnny looks like he's going to die.

"You have any fucking band-aids?" Johnny asks through gritted teeth. He's not going to make any weak ass noises right now. It doesn't even hurt that much.

Susan gives him a onceover.

"Don't think a band-aid's gonna fix that," she murmurs. "Whatever, get in. And don't get blood on anything."

Johnny rolls his eyes.

Susan's such a bitch. Johnny's grateful for it. He hates being coddled more than anything, so he's glad Susan isn't trying.

Susan's got the nice kind of home that all Encino kids do: big, spacious, full of room to display shit they can brag about.

Susan's parents have a bunch of pictures of them shaking hands with various celebrities, politicians, public figures.

It's the standard type of pictures that Encino parents keep around their house. No pictures with their children, never pictures with their children.

Encino parents hardly ever have kids they can brag about.

Johnny makes it to the kitchen without bleeding on anything except his hands and shirt, still dripping blood from his mouth. He's pretty sure his nose is fucked up too, judging by how many times he got hit in the face.

The table he's sitting at is so clean. They probably don't even eat here. They probably eat in some fancy dining hall and reserve this one for guests.

Susan comes back with a first-aid kit. Johnny knew she'd have something. Those mosh pits get wild.

She doesn't say anything as she opens the first-aid kit, getting to work on the cuts on his face.

It hurts when she cleans them up. Johnny welcomes it.

“How’d this even happen?” Susan finally asks while she’s putting a butterfly stitch over a cut on his cheek.

Johnny likes the disinterested way she asks it. He likes that he doesn’t feel like he has to reassure her he’s fine. He can just tell her the truth.

“Picked a fight,” Johnny answers, shrugging. “Guy was like 6’5. Real punchable face.”

Susan nods like it’s something she hears everyday.

“This isn’t some elaborate plan to get back with Ali, right?” Johnny hisses as she cleans blood from his nose. Fuck, it’s definitely broken. “Pretty sure she’s not going to be jealous that you’re with me.”

Johnny blinks.

Susan almost sounds…disappointed about that.

“No,” Johnny answers, shrugging. “I’m over it. Ali’s…Ali has LaRusso. I’ll find someone else, I guess.”

He’ll never have LaRusso, but he’s just going to have to be okay with that. LaRusso doesn’t want him anyways. If he did, he’d have to either be drunk or playing hero. He’ll never really want Johnny.

Susan stops cleaning the blood away from his nose, staring up at him.

What?

“What?” Johnny voices aloud.

Susan blinks slowly.

“Did you seriously just say you’re over Ali?” she asks, setting the cloth down that she’d been cleaning Johnny’s nose with.

What the hell? Why is she so surprised?

Johnny thought she'd kind of be happy, because she hated Johnny more than any of Ali's other friends did.

"Yeah?" Johnny says, shrugging again. He doesn't have to explain himself. "Like I said, Ali has LaRusso."

"Yeah, but it's Ali Mills. Like cheerleader Ali Mills, likes karate Ali Mills. Like the girl of your dreams Ali Mills," Susan tells him, monotone voice suddenly a lot more interested now.

Johnny blinks.

What the hell is Susan trying to get at?

"So?" Johnny says, because he doesn't see what the big deal is. Maybe it's because he's had forty-eight days to think this over, but he really is over Ali. Compared to LaRusso, his feelings for Ali aren't nearly as strong.

"So?" Susan repeats, a little bit louder and far more upset than she was seconds before. "Ali's perfect! She's got a really nice singing voice and she'll listen to your music even if she doesn't like it. How could you be over Ali?"

Susan's eyes are fiery, her hands balled up into fists.

Johnny blinks again.

Oh.

Johnny can't believe he didn't realize it before. That's why Susan must have been so pissed off at him while he and Ali were dating.

She likes Ali. Like really likes Ali.

"Do you…" Johnny coughs, feeling a spike of pain go through his ribs. He feels childish just asking it. "Do you have a crush on Ali?"

He cringes, because that sounded just as childish as he thought it would.

Susan freezes before deflating like a popped balloon, shoulders sagging. Her face says it all, full of misery and longing at the same time.

"Don't tell her," she murmurs. "She really doesn't need to know. She has Daniel, even though he's kind of…y'know."

“A little twerp?” Johnny offers.

Susan chuckles under her breath, nodding a little.

“I guess that’s one way to put it,” she mumbles, shrugging one shoulder. “But Ali likes him, so.”

“Yeah, I feel ya.”

Susan narrows her eyes at him. “Thought you were over Ali.”

“I am,” Johnny insists. Shit, is he really going to expose his crush on LaRusso to Susan of all people? Not like it matters since the day just resets tomorrow, but he’d be telling Susan before Bobby or anyone.

“Then why-”

“I like LaRusso,” Johnny blurts. “He’s annoying and I like that about him.”

He likes a lot more about him, but he doesn’t need to get into the mushy details with Susan or anyone, frankly.

Susan blinks wildly at him, mouth forming a small ‘o’.

“We make quite the pair then, huh?” Susan says, smiling sadly at him.

Johnny nods. He supposes they do. Two people who were dumb enough to fall for people that would never feel the same.

Well, LaRusso would never feel the same towards him. Johnny's not so sure about Ali and Susan.

Even when Johnny and Ali were together, she and Susan had been inseparable. Susan came with them practically everywhere, clinging to Ali’s arm and going off on "girl adventures" all while Johnny was still there.

Johnny thinks there's probably a chance Ali feels the same.

They sit in silence for a few moments.

"You should tell her," Johnny offers after a little bit. "Seriously, Suze.”

Susan scoffs.

“No way in hell,” Susan says, shaking her head. “You should hear the way she talks about him. Daniel this, Daniel that. We can’t ever hang out without Ali bringing him up.”

Funny, Johnny felt the same way about Susan when he and Ali were dating.

“Suze-” Johnny starts, but Susan doesn’t let him finish.

“Just shut it, Johnny,” Susan snaps, looking down at the floor. “Why don't you confess to Daniel then? Since you're just so sure it's gonna turn out with Ali."

Johnny flinches, feeling like he's been burned. He clenches his aching fists, digging them into his knees.

He doesn't need Susan to rub it in. He knows he can't tell LaRusso he likes him. He knows, okay?

LaRusso already proved to him that a confession would lead nowhere. That he'd probably just think that Johnny was trying to trick him or something.

"Because," he replies simply, shrugging. It's the best he's got.

"Because?" Susan repeats, tone pressing. "Because what, Johnny? Because you were a dick to him? Because you beat the shit out of him? Because you embarrassed him in front of his girlfriend?"

"Because I know all that!" Johnny shouts, slamming his fist into his knee with a hiss.

Susan stares at him.

Johnny's shoulders sag and he falls into himself. He swallows the lump in his throat, because he is not going to fucking cry right now. He’s not a pussy.

“Because I know all that,” Johnny repeats softly, almost a whisper. “Jesus, Suze, you don’t need to rub it in.”

Susan shrugs, almost apologetic.

They sit in the dark, silent kitchen, cleaning process forgotten.

“You really think I should tell her?” Susan says suddenly, quietly.

Johnny lifts his head to meet Susan's gaze, but she's looking at her lap. She's picking at a loose piece of fabric on her pants, winding it around her index finger until it turns red.

"Yeah," Johnny shrugs. "If you think it's bad with LaRusso, you should hear the way she talked about you."

Susan snaps her head up, deep brown eyes meeting Johnny's bright blue ones.

"Really?" Susan asks, eyes filled with curiosity. "What'd she say about me?"

Johnny shrugs, because he'd admittedly zoned out during a lot of it. He loved Ali, but he didn't want to hear about her best friend while they were watching a movie or on a date.

"That some stuff reminded you of her," Johnny replies truthfully. "She said you showed her The Thing and that you beat her at skee ball. I don't know."

Johnny shrugs again.

Susan's looking at her lap again, but she looks like she's fighting off a smile. Her cheeks are a bit pink, blushing in the way that people do when they like someone.

Jeez, is that how Johnny looks around LaRusso? Gross.

"Thanks, Johnny," Susan murmurs.

Johnny nods a little in reply.

Susan finishes bandaging his cuts, giving him some ice for his ribs. She helps him to the couch, throwing a worn quilt over him. She doesn't leave him there though, just stands at the end of the couch and stares at him.

It's kind of creeping Johnny out.

"What?" he asks, suppressing the urge to shift so she can't see him. He'd be in an uncomfortable amount of pain if he moved right now.

"You know, it probably wouldn't go horribly if you told Daniel you like him," Susan tells him, looking off to the right.

Johnny snorts, which only serves to hurt his already sore ribs.

Yeah, right.

He knows LaRusso too well. He has a rough guess of how it would go, and he's not going to entertain it any more than he has to. He doesn't need to see LaRusso look at him all disgusted and surprised just because Johnny confessed to him.

"I'm serious," Susan says, tone a bit harsher. "He provokes you like nobody's business. Don't try to act like he's not just as obsessed, Johnny."

Johnny opens and closes his mouth, staring at Susan. Susan stares back at him before heading towards the stairs, the sound of footsteps disappearing up steps ringing throughout the living room.

Johnny stares at the ceiling.

What? What the hell was Susan talking about?

Sure, LaRusso had provoked him a few times. Like when he'd poured water on Johnny or when he'd tried to get Mr. Harris to re-explain that boring as fuck history lesson. Or when Johnny had tried approaching him at the tournament or when-

Okay, LaRusso has provoked him a lot. But that doesn't mean shit, right? It just means LaRusso hates him.

Johnny scratches lightly at his neck.

But he'd met all of Johnny's challenges. There wasn't a moment he shied away from him that Johnny can remember. He was more than happy to engage with Johnny, to knock him down a peg.

For Johnny, his competition with LaRusso had never been about Ali. It'd always been about chasing LaRusso, getting LaRusso's attention, showing off to LaRusso.

Was it…was it the same for LaRusso?

Johnny wants to roll over onto his stomach and yell into one of the fancy throw pillows, but that would hurt too much and he's not a fucking girl.

Jesus, he can't get his hopes up. They'd probably start crashing down around him if he did start to get them up, but…damn it, he kind of wants to know if Susan is right.

He shouldn't go back to the tournament. He hates that fucking tournament. He shouldn't even step foot in the fucking building.

He wipes a hand over his face.

Damn it. Fucking fuck.

He's definitely going back to the tournament tomorrow. Fucking Susan.

☆

Johnny goes back to the tournament, but he decides he's not participating. No, he's going to watch this thing.

He pulls the baseball cap further over his face as he enters the building.

Susan better be fucking right.

Johnny sits as far back as he can while still getting a good view of the tournament. LaRusso is so obvious, looking so, so lost. Right, this was his first tournament ever. Somehow Johnny tends to forget that.

Jeez, they really went harsh on LaRusso for his first tournament fucking ever. And yet he still won.

Johnny can't help but feel…proud of LaRusso. Shit, he has such a horrible crush on LaRusso, doesn't he? God, he feels like an idiot.

Johnny watches the tournament, paying attention mostly to LaRusso. He didn't really get a chance to watch LaRusso all the times he's done this. He's honestly kind of impressed.

Yeah, LaRusso's form is still amateur as shit, but he's balanced. Like Johnny could probably plow into him and he wouldn't even knock him over.

Johnny watches the rest of the matches. LaRusso flies through them.

He's so fast. It's like watching a fish move through water with how smooth LaRusso is. He's come so far from the scrappy kid that Johnny fought on the beach.

Johnny almost can't watch Danny Duval's match against Bobby.

The idiot's trying to injure Duval like they have any connection to

him. They barely even fucking know Duval. They don't give a shit about Duval. He's not even a threat.

Johnny clenches his fists at his sides, resisting the urge to cheer with the rest of the crowd when Duval wins. He shouldn't be happy about it, but he is. Mostly because he's glad it's over and he doesn't have to watch Bobby act like a fucking muppet.

Johnny's on the edge of his seat for LaRusso's match against Duval.

Suffice to say it isn't pretty.

LaRusso's good, but it's clear how much more experience Duval has. Duval's moves are practiced, clean. Like he could do it with his eyes closed.

"C'mon," Johnny murmurs, watching as Duval manages to land a second hit on LaRusso. "C'mon. Get him, LaRusso."

LaRusso tries, but it's a 3-0 win for Duval.

LaRusso is gracious about it, all smiles as he shakes Duval's hand. There's some clear disappointment in his posture, but LaRusso mostly looks relieved.

Johnny feels a pang in his chest.

Shit, maybe Susan was wrong. Maybe he should just leave at this point.

But leaving would mean he wimped out. Fuck, he's not a pussy. He can't leave.

Johnny dips from the rest of the crowd heading out of the gym to head to the locker room. He can hear the showers running when he steps in. Guess he'll have to wait a bit for LaRusso.

He sits down on the bench, staring down at his jeans.

It's weird. The last time he was in here he'd actually won the stupid first place trophy. Not that he wanted to, but he had. He feels guilty about it, even though he didn't really do anything wrong.

Johnny kicks at the ground of the locker room. The paint on the floor is peeling.

Maybe he can say hi to the rest of the guys while he's here. Not that

any of them have ever managed to shower fast, because they all care about their hair too much. Not that any of them would admit it either.

God, he just hopes he doesn't run into Kreese. Kreese would fucking kill him if he saw him here. Johnny's not scared of him or anything, but he'd prefer to stay alive.

What does Kreese do when Johnny doesn't show up to the tournament? Does he just bitch out the other guys? Bobby and Tommy didn't look like Kreese had roughed any of them up when he saw them that one time. Was it just Johnny? Why did-

"Mr. Lawrence."

Shit.

Johnny lets out a long breath, gripping the rough material of his jeans.

He's not going to run. He's not a coward. He can face Kreese. He's not even scared of him.

Johnny flits his eyes up to the man in front of him, suppressing the flinch that goes up his spine.

Fuck, what's wrong with him? He feels all out of breath again.

"Nice of you to show, Mr. Lawrence," Kreese says, hands placed casually in his pockets. He's not in a fighting stance. That's good. "You're late though."

Johnny's not really sure what to say.

"I felt sick today," Johnny lies lamely, awkwardly looking away from the man in front of him.

Kreese snorts.

Shit, Johnny's in trouble.

"Pathetic," Kreese spits. "Sick. Sure. You have some real nerve showing up here after costing us the tournament, boy."

Johnny doesn't say anything, feeling trapped. Fuck, he can't breathe.

Johnny feels his body being shifted suddenly, the back of his head

meeting the metal locker. Fuck, fuck, fuck. He's so fucking screwed. He's going to fucking die here, isn't he?

Kreese has a hold on his jacket, pinning him to the locker. Johnny's not even sure if his feet are touching the ground. Shit.

"Fucking pathetic," Kreese snarls. He bares his teeth, not unlike a snake about to go for the throat. Fuck, his throat. Fuck, no, fuck please no no no- "I'll show you what happens to pathetic cowards."

Kreese sets his forearm against his throat.

Fuck no no no please no fuck he needs help. Johnny needs help he can't fuck who should he shit he needs-

"Daniel!" he cries out, because he's the first fucking person that comes to mind. "Daniel!"

Kreese's eyes widen, but he smirks without missing a beat.

"Should have remembered the first rule of Cobra Kai, Mr. Lawrence," Kreese says, faux sympathy oozing out of his voice. "Strike first."

And with that, Johnny suddenly can't breathe with the pressure of Kreese's forearm against his throat. He claws and claws and claws and fuck nobody's coming to save him nobody's going to help him nobody fucking nobody fuck fuck help fuck-

(God, he really hopes Daniel heard him.)

Johnny feels the ground beneath his feet suddenly and he can breathe. Sort of, not really but there's no pressure there thank fucking God.

He only vaguely registers that he's fucking crying his eyes out right now, only the sound of his own sobs even somewhat alerting him to it. Fuck, he can't breathe still he can't breathe he can't-

"Johnny," a soothing voice murmurs. "Johnny, Johnny, hey. Hey, man, you're okay. You're okay."

A hand wraps around his wrist, smaller than Kreese's, not at all Kreese's.

Too many voices, too many fucking people talking. Fuck, fuck, he needs out of here.

He grips onto the wrist of whoever is fucking holding him, begging,

fucking pleading to get him out of here.

Luckily, they seem to be able to hear him even though he's pretty sure he didn't say anything aloud.

Johnny feels he can breathe a little easier with the cool December air on his face. He knows he's still sobbing, but God, at least Kreese isn't near him anymore.

He feels the wet ground soaking through his jeans as the person carefully lowers him onto his knees, so disgustingly gentle with Johnny.

Johnny clings, because he can't do anything else. He vaguely registers a skinny build and a hand rubbing his back.

It takes him a moment to come down, to be able to take a deep breath with only slight sobs escaping him.

He feels worn, like a wrung out towel. He feels not quite himself.

Johnny finally pulls away, slowly. God, he's exhausted. He probably won't even be able to drive himself home like this.

"Johnny?"

Johnny would know that voice anywhere. If he had any more energy, he might be embarrassed.

"Hey," Johnny mumbles, pulling himself away from Daniel.

Daniel's staring at him, his one arm still wrapped around Johnny. Johnny can't help but find comfort in it.

His big brown eyes are full of concern, brows furrowed. He's still got his hachimaki on, a little bit skewed.

He's so beautiful.

"Hey," Daniel replies, moving his hand gently over Johnny’s back. Johnny melts into it. "You need a ride home?"

Johnny nods, breathing out shakily. Yeah, he'll take a ride home.

"We can ride with my mom. She hasn't left yet," Daniel tells him, voice barely above a whisper. "You can pick the music if you want."

Johnny nods a little, closing his eyes. He allows himself to lay his head on Daniel's shoulder, welcoming the hand rubbing his back.

It feels like hours before he hears another voice, only registering Daniel's comforting presence.

"Daniel?" a woman's voice cries out, unmistakable Jersey accent in her panicked words. "Thank God, I didn't know where you went. Mr. Miyagi told me what happened. You're not hurt, are you? If he touched you, I swear-"

"Ma," Daniel says calmly, cutting off her rushed words. "I'm fine. We're fine. Do you mind giving Johnny a ride home?"

Johnny does his best not to tense. He can only imagine what Mrs. LaRusso has heard about him.

There's a beat of silence, Daniel's arm clutched protectively around his back.

"Not at all, honey," Mrs. LaRusso says softly. "Come on, let's get going, sweetheart."

☆

Johnny ends up with his head in Daniel's lap in the backseat. Mostly because he didn't leave Daniel’s side as they walked to the car and he was too exhausted to not lay down in the back when Daniel told him he could.

Johnny lets his eyes slip shut, breathing a little easier now that he’s not near the tournament or Kreese. His throat feels wrecked from crying, scraped raw with the way he’d sobbed.

He feels Daniel’s fingers in his hair after a bit. He doesn’t know what’s with Daniel and his hair, but he’s not going to question it right now. It feels nice and he needs the comfort.

“He yelled for me,” Daniel says softly, like he’s afraid of waking Johnny. “I don’t know if he meant to, Ma, but he did.”

Daniel curls his fingers in Johnny’s hair.

“Do you think he meant to?” Daniel adds, whispering. He sounds unsure.

Johnny feels a pang in his chest.

Does Daniel really think that Johnny didn't mean to call out for him? That he was just yelling names? God, Johnny's going to be sick.

Fuck, of course he meant to call out for Daniel. He doesn't know why he did it, but he knows he meant to. Maybe it's because he's kind of in love with the fucker. Maybe it's because he'd been thinking about talking to him.

He just knows he meant to do it.

"I don't know, sweetie," Mrs. LaRusso replies kindly. "I just know he called for you and you happened to be there. You came for him when he needed you."

The rest of the drive passes in relative quiet, the only sounds coming from the road and the engine.

"Want me to wake him up so I can ask where he lives, ma?" Daniel asks, fingers pausing their movements in Johnny's hair. "I know it's somewhere in Encino."

"No," Mrs. LaRusso replies. "I was thinking he could stay here with us tonight. It's late and Encino is a bit far, isn't it?"

It's bullshit, because everyone knows Encino is only like a ten minute drive from Reseda.

"But-"

"Isn't it, Daniel?" Her tone is knowing, a hint of mirth creeping through her words.

Oh.

Mrs. LaRusso wants him to stay the night.

Johnny could cry.

"I guess it is, ma," Daniel says, sounding just as amused now. "I'll set up the air mattress when I come up."

"Thank you, Daniel."

Johnny hears the car door slam shut, figuring he should probably fake wake himself up at this point.

Turns out he doesn't need to though, Daniel's hand gently shaking his

shoulder just seconds later.

“Hey,” he whispers softly. “Hey, Johnny, wake up. We’re here.”

Johnny blinks his eyes open, grumbling just for the show of it. He doesn’t actually care too much, too busy fighting off the emotional feeling in his chest.

Johnny sits up, looking out the window.

“Where are we?” Johnny asks, but he knows. He’s been here before.

“Reseda,” Daniel answers, smiling at him. “I know it’s not fancy like the hills, but ma wants you to stay here tonight. Unless you need a ride back tonight…?”

Daniel’s all puffed up like he has a whole explanation prepared as to why Johnny should stay, but Johnny doesn’t need to be convinced. He’s tired and it’s nice to feel like someone cares, even if that someone is Daniel’s mom.

“No, I’ll be okay,” Johnny mumbles, shrugging a little. “I think I can stay one night in your mouse house.”

Johnny bursts out laughing at Daniel’s indignant squawk, taking the swat to the arm. He’s always liked how easy to mess with Daniel has been, but he doesn’t want to hurt him now. Just annoy the shit out of him.

“Yeah, yeah, laugh it up,” Daniel grumbles, shaking his head.

“Don’t worry, LaRusso, already am.”

Johnny grins at him, Daniel rolling his eyes at him in turn.

“C’mon, get out, I have to blow up the air mattress for you, asshole.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m going, LaRusso.”

☆

Johnny sits on the bed while Daniel blows up the air mattress, which is kind of a painful process to watch. It’s like the time he watched Bobby try and fail to blow up a beach ball.

Daniel’s turning red in the face, the air mattress practically flat beneath him. Jesus, he looks like he might pass out.

“Dude,” Johnny says, because it’s starting to become too sad to watch. “I’ll just take the couch, Jesus. You’re going to lose a lung doing that.”

Daniel takes a big gasping breath, pulling away from the air mattress to glare at Johnny.

“Are you kidding? My ma would kill me if I let you do that,” Daniel tells him breathlessly, chest rising and falling as he pants. “Just- give me five minutes. I almost got it.”

“Sure,” Johnny murmurs dubiously, eyeing the practically flat air mattress.

Daniel sends him a harsh glare, going back to failing at blowing up the air mattress.

Christ, Johnny’s had enough. He’s exhausted and the air mattress route is getting them fucking nowhere.

Johnny reaches out to rip the air mattress away from Daniel, only feeling a little bad that the bit of plastic seems to snag on his teeth.

“Johnny-” Daniel starts, frustrated.

“Shut up, LaRusso. I’m taking the couch,” Johnny says, not taking no for an answer.

Daniel makes noises of protest behind him as Johnny gathers up the blankets he’d been given to sleep with, Daniel’s hands waving around in the air as he talks. Johnny just ignores him, making his way out to the couch.

“You can’t- You can’t just-!” Daniel stammers, face all scrunched up. Johnny thinks it’s kind of cute. Gross. “You’ll hurt your back!”

Johnny shrugs, rolling his eyes at Daniel.

“I’ll live,” he says, flopping down onto the couch and pulling the blanket over himself. “Not gonna cry over waking up sore, LaRusso.”

Not that he’s going to wake up here tomorrow, but he’s not telling Daniel that.

Daniel huffs, dropping down into a criss-cross position next to the coffee table.

Johnny stares at him.

What the hell is he doing?

“Uh, what are you doing?” Johnny voices aloud, blinking at him.

Daniel shrugs one shoulder, scrunched up look softening a little as he looks off to the side. He rocks side to side, a never ending force of movement.

“Ma would kill me if I just left you here,” Daniel murmurs. “So I’ll just stay until you fall asleep. So she doesn’t actually kill me or whatever.”

Oh.

Johnny feels his chest melt, because it’s just so fucking *sweet* . Jesus, he’s got it bad. He wants to kiss Daniel for how sweet that was, but he knows he can’t.

Fuck, that’s right. That’s why he’d come to the tournament today. So he could actually talk to Daniel about his stupid feelings for him.

Whatever, it can wait. Johnny has all the time in the world. He’ll tell him eventually, even if it’s not now.

“Don’t watch me sleep, creep,” Johnny says as he closes his eyes, just to fuck with Daniel.

“I wasn’t going to!” Daniel argues, voice high pitched.

Johnny can’t help but chuckle.

Daniel huffs and Johnny just knows he’s crossing his arms like he usually does when he gets all pissy. The image of it only makes Johnny chuckle more.

They sit in silence for a few moments.

Truthfully, Johnny’s almost asleep when Daniel says, “Why’d you skip the tournament?”

This question again.

It’s not like it’s Daniel’s fault. It is the curse of the time loop for Johnny to have to repeat himself fucking over and over again.

He sighs.

Somehow he feels like he owes Daniel something better than he didn’t

feel like it. It's the truth, but it's also Daniel. He'll probably keep asking questions until Johnny coughs up the whole truth anyways.

"I didn't want to compete," Johnny replies truthfully. "I didn't feel like it."

Johnny knows it's still not enough. It's not what Daniel deserves to hear, at least.

"Plus," Johnny adds. "Kreese is a real dick. Probably pretty obvious, I know. He wanted to hurt you tonight though and…I don't know, man. I couldn't."

Daniel's looking at him thoughtfully, lower lip rolling back and forth between his teeth. His brows are furrowed, fingers tapping lightly against his shins.

"Why couldn't you?" he asks, sounding mostly curious. "I mean, why…why all of a sudden?"

Jesus, maybe because Johnny has it embarrassingly bad for Daniel and seeing him hurt would make him want to punch Kreese instead of finish the fucking match.

God, Johnny would do stupidly irrational things for Daniel.

It's exhilarating. It's terrifying.

Johnny takes a deep breath.

Shit, is he really saying this? Is he really going to tell him?

Fuck it, why not. Not like he has anything to lose. And hey, maybe Susan was right. Maybe Daniel does feel the same after all. And if not, there's always tomorrow.

"Because I like you, LaRusso," Johnny admits softly. "And I would do stupid fucking things for you."

Daniel stares at him, mouth dropping open.

Johnny feels his own cheeks burn, flush creeping down his neck. He's not going to take it back. He means it too much to take it back.

"Johnny," Daniel says quietly like he's afraid if he speaks too loud something might break. Redness floods his cheeks, painting his beautiful, beautiful face. "I…since when?"

“Since the beginning? I don’t know, man,” Johnny tells him, trying not to look away. Trying not to show cowardice. "I don't know if it was ever really about Ali, you know?"

Daniel stares and stares at him, mouth still open like a frog catching flies.

Johnny shifts uncomfortably.

"Unless it was for you?" Johnny asks, admittedly a bit afraid of the answer.

Daniel looks away and then looks back at him, an almost guilty look on his face.

Shit.

"I mean, yeah?" Daniel says, fiddling with the edge of his shirt. "A little bit, at least. I…wasn't it about Ali?"

He doesn't sound sure.

"Was it?" Johnny asks genuinely. He knows it wasn't for him. "I think…maybe at first it was about Ali. After a while, I just kind of wanted you to look at me, man."

Daniel opens and closes his mouth, frowning at his lap.

Johnny feels the way the adrenaline is coursing through his body. The way his hands shake and sweat. The way he can't breathe, but it's only a little bit terrifying.

Daniel tilts to his left like he's teetering on the edge of something, brows practically touching with how hard he's frowning.

"Why?" Daniel whispers, like he still can't figure it out. Like it's not even computing for him. "Why me? What happened to Ali?"

Johnny shrugs, heart pounding away in his chest.

"Kinda sick we can only kick the shit out of each other, right?" Johnny says, the thought enough to set him on fire.

He loves the fact that he and Daniel have both won the All-Valley. He loves the fact that when they fight, it's so much closer to a dance. He loves the fact that Daniel can throw him around no problem.

Johnny could do karate with him forever.

Johnny chances a glance at Daniel and he's smiling a little.

"You think I could kick the shit out of you?" Daniel asks, sounding almost shy.

Johnny grins.

"I wouldn't even bet against it," Johnny replies, because of course Daniel can kick the shit out of him. Johnny loves that he can.

Daniel looks up at him, eyes so soft as he meets Johnny's gaze. He lays a hand on the couch and fuck, is he going to kiss Johnny?

Daniel leans in and Johnny tilts his head up. He's waited for this for so long.

"Wait," Daniel mumbles, yanking his head back so hard that Johnny thinks he might give himself whiplash. "Wait, wait. I-I can't. Ali, man. Fuck, Ali. I'm dating Ali."

Johnny shrugs, because he's had this conversation with Ali before. And Ali really deserves someone who's going to care for her and frankly? Johnny would bet everything he has that that person is probably Susan.

"Don't act like it's not a big deal!" Daniel says, almost yelling. His shoulders are tense and shit, he looks like a spooked animal. "I'm…I'm with Ali, dude."

Johnny sits up a little.

Fuck, Daniel looks kind of freaked out. His hands are balled up into fists, hands shaking by his side.

"Daniel," Johnny says softly. "Do you want Ali?"

Johnny would let every hope he had for Daniel go if he wanted Ali. If he wanted to be with her tonight instead, Johnny wouldn't stop him from leaving.

Daniel lets out a shaky sigh.

"I don't know, man," Daniel murmurs. "I just…fuck. Fuck, man. I guess it wasn't about Ali."

Johnny nods, quiet. It's kind of weird to figure it out, because it should have been about Ali. How quickly that fell apart.

"Fuck," Daniel says again, laying his head on the couch. "You drive me crazy, man. I'd do stupid things for you too."

Johnny hesitates for a second before he lifts his hand. Fuck it, Daniel would do the same thing for him.

He combs his fingers through Daniel's hair gently, a soft sigh leaving Daniel's lips as he does. Slowly but surely, the tension seeps out of his body.

"You make me act like such a fucking idiot, man," Daniel mumbles. "I was never this dumb before you."

"I bet you were," Johnny comments teasingly, laughing when Daniel swats weakly at him.

"Fuck you, man," Daniel mumbles, turning his head further unto the couch. "You said you'd do stupid things for me too, dude."

Johnny hums.

He would do stupid things for Daniel. He *has* done stupid things for Daniel.

"I'd punch Kreese for you, dude," Johnny admits, the confession feeling almost raw.

They sit quietly for a few minutes, only the sound of Daniel's quiet breathing filling the room.

"Why'd you even join Cobra Kai, man?" Daniel asks.

Johnny jumps.

Shit, he thought Daniel had fallen asleep.

"What?" Johnny asks, not having heard what Daniel said.

"Why'd you join Cobra Kai?"

Johnny blinks.

He doesn't know why Daniel had asked him that of all things, but he has an answer. It's the answer the rest of the guys would probably

give too if Daniel asked them.

“To get stronger,” Johnny answers, shrugging. “I was once a muscleless loser too, LaRusso.”

Johnny can’t see him, but he can practically feel the way Daniel rolls his eyes at him. Johnny can’t help but grin.

“Then why’d you stay? Y’know, if Kreese is such an asshole,” Daniel asks, tilting his chin to face Johnny. His eyebrows are raised, a little bit of judgment showing on his face. Johnny doesn’t think Daniel gets to judge him, but he sort of gets it.

To be fair, Daniel also just looks curious. Like he wants to know what could keep someone in a space where someone would choke them without remorse.

Johnny could say it was fear. Johnny could say it was anger. Johnny could say it was because he wanted the power Cobra Kai gave him. They’d all be true.

Maybe the one reason that’s always stood out to him the most was the way Kreese felt like his father. The way Kreese made him strong enough to not cry whenever Sid yelled or would look at him with approval or pride whenever he did something right.

Johnny can’t remember his dad, but Kreese is the closest thing he ever got to one.

He doesn’t say this to Daniel though. It’s too much and it feels too clunky to try to string together into a coherent sentence.

“He taught me what I know,” Johnny answers, shrugging. It’s stupid but true. “He let me take his car out once. He gave me my first beer. Guy stuff, y’know?”

Daniel stares at him, judgmental look softening. He looks away from Johnny, looking lost in thought as he stares across the room.

“Yeah, I know,” Daniel mumbles, scratching lightly at his arm. “Mr. Miyagi did the same stuff with me.”

Silence settles around them after that, the sound of crickets coming faintly from outside.

Daniel falls asleep with his face smushed into the couch and Johnny

falls asleep with his hand settled in Daniel's hair.

☆

Johnny wakes up in his own bed, but it's honestly refreshing.

Really, knowing that his confession to Daniel won't blow up in his face has kind of rejuvenated him. He feels he could do anything, really.

He takes some time away from the tournament again, because he's probably going to throw up if he sees Kreese again after he's tried to choke Johnny twice. Not that he's avoiding him, just…taking some time to himself.

He goes back to the diner a few times, because he's missed their fucking pancakes and how nice Jenny is to him. He visits Susan once, because having it bad for anyone sucks but especially someone who's already in a relationship. He even takes some time just to ride his bike around.

Everything just feels…better. Looser. Less hellish than it did this past month or so.

Johnny wakes up the day of the sixtieth loop and he just feels good. Like he's on top of the fucking world. He's kind of pumped.

He passes by his mom's door like he's done sixty times at this point, pausing as he looks. She can't be comfortable all curled up like that.

If this is the last loop, then she deserves to be comfortable for it. And if not, then she deserves to be comfortable anyways. Johnny should probably make this part of his routine in these loops too.

He adjusts the pillows behind her, trying to make it a little bit more comfortable. He even shifts her onto her back so she's not all curled up.

Johnny takes the wine glass from the nightstand, bringing it down to the sink to wash later. He'll do it when he gets back, even though it may not even matter tomorrow.

He drives to the tournament blaring Black Sabbath, drumming the steering wheel and bobbing his head a little. He hasn't played his cassette in here in what feels like fucking forever. He's missed it.

Johnny climbs out of the car, nodding his head still to the beat even though he doesn't have his walkman with him. Bobby's waiting for him outside, looking at the ground.

Johnny makes his way over to Bobby, grinning as he sees him. Man, he hasn't really gotten a chance to talk to Bobby these past few loops.

"About time, man," Bobby says, smiling at him.

Johnny doesn't even say anything, just pulls Bobby into a hug and slaps his back. Bobby returns it, seeming more confused than anything else.

Johnny pulls away, grinning from ear-to-ear. Bobby returns it, though he looks surprised.

"Hey, you doing okay?" Bobby asks, because he's the fucking best and Johnny's grateful for him. "You're not gonna be sick, are you, man?"

Johnny laughs, punching Bobby lightly in the arm. Bobby laughs, punching him back.

"Ew, man, no," Johnny tells him, still laughing. "No, dude, I'm fine. I just feel…good. C'mon, let's get inside."

Bobby's concerned look settles into something a little bit more relaxed, almost relieved. Jeez, he's such a worrier. Johnny likes that about him though.

Johnny walks to the locker room with a little bit of bounce in his step. He probably looks stupid, but he can't even bring himself to care.

Johnny walks behind the other guys as they enter the locker room, just looking around the room. It needs a fresh coat of paint or something. Shit's really starting to chip in some places.

"Well, well, well, look who we have here, fellows," Dutch says. Fuck, he forgot about this. "Our little friend, Danielle-"

They're not doing this. Not today.

"Dutch," he says, slapping a hand on his shoulder. "Leave him, man."

Dutch blinks at him. Johnny can feel the other guys' eyes on him too, but he doesn't turn around to face them. He doesn't need to explain himself right now.

“Fuck off, man,” Dutch grumbles, shrugging Johnny’s hand off. “What are you, his mommy?”

“You’ll have plenty of time to kick his ass at the tournament,” Johnny replies, then raises an eyebrow. “Unless you think you can’t.”

Dutch huffs out a laugh, rolling his eyes. Yeah, that’s what Johnny thought.

“Oh fuck off, man, I could kick his ass any day of the week,” Dutch tells him, glaring daggers at Johnny.

“Then don’t be a pussy and prove it. Out there.”

Dutch rolls his eyes at him. “Yes, *mom* .”

Yeah, Dutch is definitely going to kill him when he loses to Daniel later, but that’s future Johnny’s problem. Right now Johnny’s problem is just getting out to the tournament without starting any more fights.

Tommy’s staring at him, Jimmy’s not looking at him, and Bobby looks almost proud of Johnny. Sappy fuck.

“C’mon, let’s get going, boys,” Johnny says, motioning towards the locker room doors. “Go kick some fucking ass.”

That at least seems to liven the group a bit more, Tommy letting out a hoot of approval. He slaps Johnny’s chest as he passes him, Jimmy slapping him on the shoulder right after. Bobby just stops in front of him, patting his chest with a grin.

“Good luck out there, man,” Bobby tells him, nodding before he heads out.

“You too,” Johnny calls after him.

Johnny can already feel Daniel staring at him before he turns around, Daniel’s mouth wide open as he looks at Johnny. He still has that deer caught in headlights look, but he doesn’t look scared now. Mostly just shocked.

“You too, man. Good luck out there,” Johnny tells him, even though he doesn’t really believe there’s luck in fighting. Daniel wouldn’t need it anyways since he’s thrown Johnny around before.

Daniel blinks dumbly at him, mouth opening and closing.

Johnny just grins at him before jogging out the doors.

It's gonna be a good tournament.

☆

Johnny wins his semi-final match and he feels good.

His heart pounds at the idea of facing Daniel again. He always feels like he's improving whenever he fights Daniel. It's exciting.

"Bobby," he hears and fuck.

He feels that familiar shock of fear fill him, fuck. He's not going back to fucking Cobra Kai after this. He refuses to. As much as he loves karate, he's going to do it his way, not Kreese's way.

He reaches out for Bobby's gi, clutching the back of it in his hand. Bobby's too fucking smart to be listening to Kreese. Maybe Johnny could convince Bobby to stop going to Cobra Kai too. It's not worth it, it can't be worth it.

Bobby turns around to look at him, staring at him with those Pacific Ocean blue eyes. Bobby's brows furrow, his head tilting curiously.

"Don't do it, man," Johnny whispers to him. "Don't."

Bobby's gaze softens. He reaches out a hand to gently pull Johnny's hand from his gi, Bobby's fingers wrapping loosely around his wrist.

"I won't," Bobby whispers back. "I won't."

Johnny lets him go, trusting him. Trusting that he won't, because he hasn't these past loops and he's never lied to Johnny.

And Bobby doesn't.

The match is fair and Daniel kicks his ass, and Bobby takes it graciously because he's Bobby. He's grinning and congratulating Daniel on his win, shaking his shoulder a bit. Daniel looks surprised, but he grins all the same.

Bobby slaps Johnny's shoulder when he passes him, an act of belief. The belief that Johnny can win his match. It feels good, but truth be told, Johnny doesn't care if he wins or loses. He just wants it to be a good match.

And it is a good match. It's a great match.

The fight is so much like a dance that Johnny has to stop himself from getting distracted by how in awe he is of it. The fact that they're barely landing hits on each other. The fact that every hit earned is so fought for.

They end up tied.

"Fight!" the ref yells.

It's a struggle for another point, but Johnny almost loses his balance at one point and that's all the advantage Daniel needs to land a third hit.

Johnny can't help but smile as he watches Mrs. LaRusso and Ali surround Daniel. He deserves it, he really does. He's been scrappy since day one and he didn't give up a single one of his matches here either.

Johnny grabs the trophy from the announcer's hands, placing it in Daniel's with a grin.

"You're alright, LaRusso," he says, beaming at him. "Good match."

"Thanks a lot," Daniel says, but he's more focused than the last time Johnny said it. He's actually looking at Johnny, grinning at him.

It feels good. It makes something swell in Johnny's chest, something like affection. Jeez, his stupid heart wants what it wants, huh?

☆

The guys are all quiet in the locker room.

Johnny feels bad that he's almost giddy.

He tries not to let it show, glancing at the way Tommy's just holding his street clothes out in front of him. He hasn't even bothered to change into them yet, just clenching them in his hands.

Johnny sighs.

He doesn't have to fix it. He doesn't have to say anything, really, since it's not his job. But…these guys are kind of like his family. They've been here since day one at Cobra Kai and they've been there for Johnny every step of the way.

Johnny should at least be there for them too. Even though he might have to do it all again tomorrow, it'll be worth it. He knows it will.

Johnny lifts himself from the bench, making his way over to stand in front of Tommy.

"Hey, man," he mumbles, nudging his shoulder. "You did good."

"Shut up, man," Tommy mumbles, hands shaking. "I lost to fucking LaRusso. Fucking LaRusso, man!"

He throws his clothes at the ground, digging his fists into his thighs.

"Fucking sucks to lose, dude," Johnny says sympathetically, carefully picking up Tommy's gray t-shirt off the floor. "Can't go home in your gi though."

Tommy clenches and unclenches his fists in his lap.

"C'mon. I lost to LaRusso too. So did Jimmy. So did Dutch. So did Bobby. We all did," Johnny says, sitting next to Tommy so he can bump Tommy's shoulder with his own. "And it fucking sucks, man, we know. Let's get pancakes or something. Not like we have to cut for the tournament or anything anymore."

Tommy doesn't say anything for a moment, just stares out at the lockers across from him.

He unclenches his fists with a sigh.

"Yeah, okay," Tommy mumbles. "Let's get pancakes."

Tommy turns over his shoulder, leaning back a little.

"Hey!" he yells. "Guys, we're getting pancakes!"

That seems to liven the room a little, Dutch letting out a little woot of approval before pulling his shirt over his head. Jimmy's smiling now, bumping elbows with Bobby. Bobby's got a grin of his own, sending Johnny a grateful look.

(And, huh, isn't that new? Bobby's actually in the locker room this loop.)

Johnny just shrugs, smiling like an idiot himself.

It's at least ten minutes before the guys manage to get out of the

locker room since they get caught up in whether or not french toast is better than pancakes.

Well, Dutch is arguing that french toast is better. It's kind of a 4v1 argument.

It's nice to be able to hang out with all the guys again. It's been a while since Johnny's been able to do this.

Johnny's listening to the other guys argue with Dutch when he spots Daniel heading out of the building. Jeez, they must have been bickering for longer than he thought.

"Hey," Johnny cuts in, earning a glare from Dutch who he's sure was in the middle of explaining the texture of french toast again. "I need to do something real quick. I'll catch up."

The guys just nod a little, too caught up in their playful argument to pay him any mind. Johnny jogs off towards Daniel, who's been stopped by two boys for an autograph.

Johnny's not even jealous. Daniel deserves it for how hard he fought. Okay, maybe he's a little jealous, but that's beside the point.

He waits until Daniel's done, watching the way his eyes widen as he spots Johnny.

"What?" Daniel says defensively, sending Johnny a suspicious look.

"Hey," Johnny says, tucking his hands into his pocket. His heart pounds away in his chest, hands clammy. Man, he doesn't know how he even survived his first confession to Daniel. "I just wanted to say congrats. On winning the tournament. You were good."

Daniel stares at him for a moment, searching Johnny's face like he's trying to figure out if Johnny's trying to trick him. He seems to find nothing, because his shoulders relax a little.

"Thanks," Daniel murmurs. "Uh, you too. You were good too."

"Thanks," Johnny replies a little awkwardly. He digs his shoe into the pavement. "Uh, I wanted to tell you one more thing."

Daniel raises an eyebrow. "Yeah?"

Shit, he'd just blurted that out without thinking about it. Is he really doing this? Fuck his lack of brain to mouth filter, Jesus.

“I, look, I’m-” Johnny stammers, clenching his fists in his pocket. Jesus Christ, he can do this. He can say it. “I’m sorry, okay? Halloween and all that shit was fucked up.”

His face is so hot. His neck is probably sweating by now. Jesus, he can’t believe he did that.

Daniel’s staring at him, eyes wide.

“Well, that’s, uh, all I wanted to say, so,” Johnny rushes out. Fuck, he needs to get out of here. “See ya at school, LaRusso.”

Johnny turns on his heel, not bothering to turn to look at Daniel as he quickly rushes over to the guys. They’re crowded around Bobby’s car, seeming to have settled into just shooting the shit.

Johnny nods at them as they spot him coming over, earning four nods in return. He settles into a spot near Bobby’s side, getting caught up in the conversation soon enough.

They mostly talk about school and assignments they have, which Johnny can barely remember since it’s been about two months since he’s actually had to do school. Fuck, he said he was going to be an ex-degenerate this year and he’s gotten caught up in both a karate rivalry and a time loop.

“Mr. Lawrence.”

Johnny can’t help the way he tenses, not letting himself look up for a minute.

Shit, they waited for too long and now he has to deal with Kreese. Fuck.

“Yeah?” Johnny asks, forcing himself to look up. Kreese is standing right outside their circle, between Dutch and Jimmy. Kreese is glaring at Johnny, practically burning a hole through him.

Shit.

“You lost,” Kreese tells him. “You’re a loser.”

Jimmy and Dutch both tense, looking at the ground. They both lost tonight too, but of course he’s not talking to them. Just Johnny.

Johnny doesn’t really care about the tournament anymore though. He doesn’t give a shit about winning or losing. He’s won and lost this

tournament and none of it made a difference to the time loop anyways, so who gives a shit?

Johnny shrugs a little. It only seems to piss Kreese off more.

He shoves through Jimmy and Dutch, getting in Johnny's face. Johnny feels ice cold fear in his veins, but he stares up at Kreese anyways.

"You don't care?" Kreese growls. "Your enemy caught a weak point and exploited it. You should be ashamed."

And yet, Johnny isn't.

Johnny turns his back, because he doesn't have to stay here. He said he was going to get pancakes with the guys and he is going to get pancakes with them.

"Mr. Lawrence-" He feels a hand grip the back of his jacket and doesn't even have time to think before he's whipping around and punching Kreese in the face.

Kreese drops like a sack of potatoes, hitting the asphalt with a thud.

Holy shit, he can't believe he just did that. All the guys are staring at him, so clearly they can't believe it either.

Shit, that…that felt really good.

"Strike first," Johnny spits and with that, turns around to head over to his Avanti. He hears footsteps behind him, so at least none of the guys are too in shock.

Johnny pulls up next to Bobby's Mercedes as he's heading out, pressing down on the horn lightly just to get his attention. Bobby jumps just a little bit before turning to face Johnny with a smile. Tommy's in his passenger seat, feet kicked up on the dash with a pair of sunglasses on his face that he'd clearly dug from somewhere out of Bobby's car.

"Race ya," Johnny says, because he's missed it and he's always going to take advantage of an opportunity to race Bobby's shitty little Mercedes.

"You're on," Bobby says, because he'd never pass up on an opportunity to try and show off his car even though it's the worst.

Bobby and Johnny both jump at the sound of Dutch's horn behind

them. He's leaning out his window, a shit-eating grin on his face.

"I'll race both of you!" he yells, honking his horn again. "You'd both fucking lose!"

Johnny…well, Johnny actually doesn't doubt that. It definitely has more kick to it than Johnny's car does and way more kick than Bobby's car.

"You're on, Dutch!" Johnny yells back, meeting the glare Bobby sends his way with a smirk. "What? You know you're gonna lose."

"Yeah, right," Bobby scoffs, rolling his eyes. "You're on."

Johnny presses on the gas and speeds off, ignoring the shouts behind him.

God, he's having so much fun. He's missed this.

☆

Pancakes go well save for the occasional flying bit of flapjack thanks to Tommy trying to land it in Dutch's mouth by catapulting it off his fork.

Bobby confiscates Tommy's fork after a piece of pancake lands in his cup and splatters water all over Bobby's jeans.

Mostly they just talk about anything and everything, laughing at stupid jokes and remembering stupid things they did together.

It's good to be with the guys like this. It's easy.

Afterwards, Johnny invites them back to his house. It's not usually the sleepover spot considering Sid is a dick, but he wants to hang out a little more even if they're all probably just going to wake up in their own beds tomorrow.

Bobby sits on his bed, Tommy on his desk, Dutch in his desk chair, and Jimmy on the floor. They'll all probably migrate to Johnny's bed or the floor once it starts to get late anyways.

They talk some more until Bobby falls asleep around 10:30, because he's an old man. Dutch moves himself to the floor and passes out within fifteen minutes of being there despite insisting he won't.

Jimmy picks at some loose threads on his carpet, twirling the beige

material between his fingertips. Tommy's fucking with some notebook on his desk, drawing something with a pen he definitely had to dig out of one of the drawers. Probably a dick.

Johnny's close to falling asleep himself honestly.

It's been a long day. He lets his head fall back against the wall and closes his eyes, ready to just fall asleep sitting up.

"Punching Kreese was kind of cool," Jimmy says suddenly, causing Johnny to open his eyes. He's not looking at Johnny, just at the carpet he's messing with.

"It was pretty awesome, man," Tommy adds, gaze still aimed intently at his drawing. He snorts. "He's gonna kill you tomorrow at training."

Johnny grimaces.

If this is the last loop, he's not going back tomorrow. He's not going back ever.

"Don't think I'm gonna go tomorrow," Johnny says, shrugging his shoulders a little.

Johnny can practically hear the record scratch in Jimmy and Tommy's brains, both of them turning to look at him at the same time. Creepy.

"What do you mean?" Tommy asks, frowning at Johnny.

Johnny shrugs again.

"I'm not going back, man. Kreese is dangerous. He hurts people," Johnny says and he knows that Kreese hasn't tried to choke him out in this universe, but they have to know that, right? They have to know that Kreese is an asshole.

"I mean, he's a dick, yeah," Tommy says. "He's just like that, man."

"Yeah," Jimmy agrees, but he doesn't sound as sure. "I…he did call Johnny out for losing. We all lost tonight and he still looked pretty pissed that Johnny got *second* , man. Who knows how pissed he is at the rest of us."

Tommy bites his lower lip, digging the pen into the piece of paper he's opened up on.

"I guess," Tommy mumbles, going back to his drawing. "It's not worth

quitting over."

Johnny wants to be angry at Tommy. He wants to tell him how Kreese has choked him twice and that he can't be fucking trusted and everything else.

But…Tommy didn't live through that like Johnny did. He'd probably think Johnny was crazy anyways if Johnny told him what happened.

"Whatever, man," Johnny sighs out, closing his eyes again.

(Some part of him begs to wake up and have it be December 20th tomorrow, but he ignores it. He's not a dog who's going to beg for table scraps.)

☆

Johnny wakes up to someone's knee in his stomach.

Jesus, is he dreaming or something? Why is-

Johnny bolts upright, staring down at none other than Bobby. Bobby, who can't sleep fucking normally, so he always knees Johnny.

Holy shit.

Holy shit. He…he's out of the time loop. It's…it's December 20th.

Johnny feels a rush of relief and happiness followed by a rush of bitterness and anger. On one hand, thank fucking God and on the other, why did he have to be stuck there for two fucking months? Fuck, man.

Johnny scrambles out of bed, narrowly avoiding tripping over Dutch and Jimmy. Tommy's asleep at his desk, curled over the open notebook where he was definitely drawing a dick.

Johnny swallows the lump in his throat. He refuses to fucking cry but fuck, it's been so long since he's had something like this.

He practically runs down the stairs, because he needs to make sure this is real. He needs to make sure it's really December 20th.

When Johnny gets to the kitchen, he gasps.

His mother is standing over the stove, moving around eggs in a pan with a spatula.

Fuck. Fuck, he hasn't seen his mom in forever either. He's just seen her in bed, not nearly enough.

Johnny moves toward her without thinking, wrapping her up in a hug, because he missed his fucking mom and he's not afraid to think it.

She gasps, letting go of the pan almost immediately so she can hold Johnny back.

Johnny still feels like a kid when she holds him even though he's so much taller than her now. He missed her so, so much.

"Hey," she says softly, rubbing a gentle hand up and down Johnny's back. "Hey, what's wrong, sweetheart?"

Johnny swallows past the lump in his throat.

"Nothing," Johnny murmurs, slowly pulling away. "Nothing, mom. Just surprised to see you."

She gives him a look like she knows he's not telling the whole truth, but she doesn't say anything.

"Well, I figured I could make breakfast since Sid has a meeting. Just you and me," she says, smiling softly at him.

The *like we used to* goes unsaid.

Johnny feels a little bad that he invited the guys over now. He does want to have breakfast with just his mom.

"Uh," Johnny says, looking away awkwardly. "The guys are kind of here right now. Not awake, but they will be."

Johnny chances a glance back at his mom, surprised to see she's beaming at him. Right, she loves all the guys. They're like her four other sons she never had.

"Wake them up, hon," she tells him kindly. "We can have breakfast while Sid is out."

So, Johnny does.

It's nice, if not a little chaotic. It's always chaos with the guys though, so Johnny's not even surprised.

Bobby makes small talk with his mom, because he's polite to parents

and no one else. Dutch and Tommy get into a kicking war under the table while Jimmy steals bits of Dutch's eggs while he's not looking.

Johnny's glad to have this back. He's glad he gets to keep it now, not worried about the stupid time loop curse of having to repeat himself day after day.

Tommy snatches a piece of bacon off Johnny's plate.

Johnny's never been more grateful.

☆

Johnny's life mostly goes back to normal after.

Christmas comes and goes uneventfully, another year with the guys getting him both stupid gag gifts and actually nice gifts. Johnny does the same for them and he gets his mom a necklace too.

Being around the guys has gone back to feeling normal, at least. Johnny's no longer worried he's going to burst into tears any time he hangs out with the guys, because he actually gets to keep these memories with them since time is finally passing in a linear way.

Johnny goes to Susan's annual New Year party she hosts.

It's mostly just an excuse to get drunk since nobody actually watches Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve even though it's always on at the party. Not that it matters since it's only nine PM at night when the ball drops in Times Square.

Johnny had about enough alcohol to last a lifetime during the loop, but he still indulges a little.

C'mon, if he has access to Coors Banquet, then he's going to drink it. He never even drank Coors in the loop, just wine and whiskey. They both taste like shit compared to Coors.

Johnny sits out on Susan's balcony, bottle in hand as he looks outside. Susan's got a big fucking backyard with an underground pool and so many little statues and trees. It's a little ridiculous in Johnny's opinion, but his backyard looks the exact same.

He doesn't react when he hears footsteps, figuring it's someone ready to puke their guts out over the balcony. It's happened at parties Johnny's been to before.

“Johnny?”

Oh. Not a drunk person puking their guts out then.

Johnny turns around slowly, leaning back against the railing. Daniel’s standing in front of him wearing a long sleeved blue sweater and a pair of jeans, holding onto a red solo cup.

After seeing Daniel almost everyday for two months, it’s been sort of weird not seeing him. Johnny’s heart kickstarts just looking at him.

He looks handsome, relaxed. Johnny’s hands sweat.

“Hey,” Johnny says, raising his Coors in greeting. Daniel raises his red solo cup, the motion awkward and unpracticed.

Daniel shifts his weight from one leg to the other, hand clenching slightly around his cup.

What the hell does he want to say?

Johnny waits him out. Embarrassingly, he thinks he’d probably wait at least another hour for Daniel to say what he wants to say. Maybe a whole day. Jeez, he’s gone soft.

“Ali said you quit Cobra Kai,” Daniel finally blurts. He scratches the back of his head, almost seeming to shrink in on himself. “I, uh, heard her talking to Barbara about it.”

Johnny has no doubt Barbara heard it from Dutch, because Barbara has a huge crush on Dutch and Dutch has a huge crush on Barbara.

Johnny has zero problem talking about it though, so he supposes he doesn’t actually give a shit if Dutch told Barbara or not. Yeah, he fucking quit, so what? Good fucking riddance.

Johnny shrugs.

“Yeah,” Johnny says, taking a sip from his Coors. “I did.”

Daniel blinks a few times like he wasn’t expecting Johnny to actually confirm that he did.

“Why?” Daniel asks, tilting his head. His brows are furrowed, looking like he can’t even begin to fathom why Johnny would quit.

Johnny shrugs again.

“Kreese sucks, man,” Johnny replies, taking another sip. “Like really fucking sucks.”

Daniel's eyebrows shoot up like that wasn't what he thought Johnny was going to say.

"Not because you lost?" Daniel asks, taking a sip from his drink and immediately making a face at it.

The question probably would have pissed Johnny off if Daniel didn’t look so stupidly sincere about it. That and Johnny is a little bit drunk and definitely in love with Daniel, so the question is more comedic than anything else.

Johnny laughs, tilting his head towards his chest.

“Jeez, I’m not that weak, LaRusso,” Johnny says, setting his beer down on the railing. “I’m not going to quit karate because of one loss, dude. Didn’t quit when your sensei kicked my ass, did I?”

“No,” Daniel replies, knocking the edge of the plastic cup against his lower lip. He shifts his weight again, squeezing the cup lightly. “Are you…done with karate?”

Huh, he hadn’t thought about that.

On one hand, it’s been nice not having to constantly do karate. He can just sit back and not have to worry about Kreese breathing down on his neck.

On the other hand, Johnny's felt this itch in his hands every time he drives by the dojo. He wants to spar. He wants to feel someone push him into the ground. He wants the hard hit of knuckles in his stomach, across his face.

Johnny knows he's not a gentle person. There's a reason he chose karate over any other sport.

Looking at Daniel now, Johnny still doesn't crave gentleness. He wants to fight him, spar him.

He wants that dance back. He wants to beat him and he wants to be thrown around by him like two wild animals fighting in the woods.

He wants to kiss him too. He wants to be soft with him, which is so gross but goddamn, he wants it.

He refuses to go back to Kreese just so he can have karate though. Johnny still remembers Daniel's cries like he was a wounded animal. Johnny still remembers how he felt fear like one.

Johnny doesn't say any of this to Daniel though, because it's complicated and he'd be exposing himself belly up for Daniel to see.

Instead, he just hums.

"I don't know," Johnny replies, taking another sip of his beer. "Are you?"

Daniel furrows his brows, chewing slightly on the lid of his cup.

"Yeah," Daniel says, but he doesn't sound sure about it. Still, Johnny feels his stomach plummet.

"I bet I could kick your ass right now," Johnny blurts out, throwing out the bait. Wanting Daniel to take it.

Daniel's eyes light up like a campfire set ablaze. He seems to almost grin, but he holds it back and twists it into something like a grimace.

"I'm not going to fight you, dude," Daniel says, but he's not even looking at Johnny as he says it. He's staring off at something into the distance, tapping lightly on his cup with his pointer finger. "We already settled this, man."

Johnny frowns.

He doesn't want to settle anything. He wants to spar. He wants to do karate with Daniel. Jesus, he wants to do *karate* with *Daniel* . His feelings really know no bounds, huh?

"What, scared you'll lose?" Johnny challenges, because he knows it'll get Daniel riled up and he loves to annoy him.

Daniel whips his head around to glare at him, that molten hot fiery look back in his eyes.

Johnny can't help but smirk.

There he is.

"You're the one who lost the tournament, asshole," Daniel tells him hotly, but he almost sounds amused. "Fine. You're on, man."

Johnny grins.

This is going to be good.

☆

Johnny can't help but grin the entire time he drives them to the beach.

He remembers the last time they sparred at the beach. How it'd felt so easy just like sparring with the guys was. How Johnny could probably spar with Daniel for ages and never get bored, because he knows Daniel would find new ways to surprise him.

He's so soft for the fucker. It's ridiculous. Johnny can't believe he likes it.

Johnny takes off his jacket before they spar, because he likes the fucking thing and he is not getting sand on it. He ignores Daniel rolling his eyes at it, because he actually finds the fucker endearing now.

It's like dancing again.

Every punch met with a block, every move met with one to counter it. They move around each other in circles, a poor imitation of a lazy susan.

Daniel's face is all pinched up, throwing everything he has into his punches and kicks. He's got that stupid huffy look on his face.

Johnny can't help but grin.

It feels good to know they're evenly matched like this. Johnny wants to team up with him. He wants to do karate with Daniel instead of against him. He wants to do all of it.

He really fucking hopes he gets the chance to team up with him one day. They'd be un-fucking-stoppable. His heart is beating fast just thinking about it.

At some point, Johnny's foot sinks into the sand and he almost falls, which gives Daniel enough time to knock him on his ass. Johnny hits the sand, not even caring that he lost.

Daniel's grinning this shit-eating, triumphant as he drops into a kneel over Johnny. His knees press into Johnny's sides and he seems all too

joyous as he pulls his fist back.

Shit, is he really going to punch him?

Johnny mentally shrugs.

Oh well. Not like he hasn't been punched in the face before.

Johnny closes his eyes, bracing himself for an impact that never comes. He only feels air woosh by his face and then a flick to his ear.

Johnny squawks, shoving at Daniel's chest.

He barely even moves at Johnny's shove, just grinning this shit-eating grin like the little bastard he is. He shoves Johnny back even though there's nowhere to go, catching Johnny's wrist when he tries to shove him again.

Johnny stares up at Daniel, fingers twitching a little in his grasp.

Daniel's face is flushed from exertion, big brown eyes shining in the moonlight.

He's beautiful like this.

Johnny can't believe it took him going through a time loop to realize how beautiful Daniel is, but shit, he really is.

He kind of takes Johnny's breath away. Of course, that could be the fact he did just spend who knows how long sparring with Daniel.

"I won," Daniel says like he's not literally kneeling over Johnny. He still has that stupidly smug smile on his lips.

He says it like Johnny should feel slighted, but Johnny's lost too many times to Daniel to even sort of feel upset about it. He just wants to fight him again.

Johnny doesn't say anything, too busy staring up at Daniel.

Daniel leans forward, pressing Johnny's wrist into his chest. Fuck, Johnny can feel how fast his heart his beating against the back of his hand. Can Daniel feel it too?

"What, cat got your tongue?" Daniel teases, stupidly floppy brown hair hanging over his face like a curtain. Jesus, Johnny wants to kiss him. He wants to push that stupidly floppy brown hair behind his ear

and kiss him.

Daniel leans in more, just a few inches away from Johnny's face. Johnny doesn't really know what he's trying to accomplish right now but holy fuck, he definitely has a crush on Daniel.

Johnny watches the way Daniel's eyes flicker down to Johnny's lips, looking away fast like he's trying to hide it.

Johnny feels his breath hitch, watching the way Daniel's eyes flicker back up to meet his gaze.

Johnny swallows.

Daniel's eyes soften, his eyes falling back to Johnny's lips.

God, don't be a pussy , Johnny thinks, *don't be a pussy and do something about it* .

Daniel leans in and Johnny closes his eyes. Fuck, he's waited so long for this.

He feels Daniel's lips press against his and it is everything he's wanted for the past several weeks.

Daniel's lips are a little bit chapped but so soft and fuck, Johnny's so weak for him.

It feels nothing like kissing Ali. Nothing like playful pecks or makeout sessions in the back of his car.

No, it's hungry. Wanting. Tender. Soft. Devouring.

Johnny's fingers twitch against his chest, wanting to reach out and curl his fingers around Daniel's neck. Wanting to pull him in further.

Daniel doesn't let go though, just slides his fingers from his wrist to Johnny's hand and slots their fingers together. Johnny holds on for dear life.

He doesn't know how long they kiss, but he's breathless by the time Daniel pulls away from him.

Daniel's lips and cheeks are red when he pulls away, chest heaving slightly with the way he pants.

Fuck, he's gorgeous.

Johnny hasn't let go of Daniel's hand, squeezing it as hard as he can just in case. Just in case it's a dream or Johnny somehow got stuck in the loop again.

Daniel looks ready to kiss him again, his eyes already half lidded and head tilted forward.

Fuck, he really wants Daniel to kiss him again. To lean in and press kiss after kiss to his lips and face and-

Holy fuck, wait. Wait, shit, what the fuck was Johnny thinking? Daniel definitely has a girlfriend.

Daniel definitely has fucking Ali and fuck, how could Johnny forget? That's why they didn't kiss that one loop. He's such an idiot.

He goes to push Daniel back, but their hands are still connected and he mostly just succeeds in moving their hands from Johnny's chest to Daniel's.

Daniel doesn't say anything, tilting his head curiously at Johnny.

"We can't," Johnny blurts, pushing a little at Daniel's chest. "This- we…we just can't."

"Why?" Daniel asks, heat invading his tone. "What, because we're both boys?"

Johnny can't help but stare up at him, because what the fuck?

Jesus, Johnny doesn't even give a shit about that. Is Daniel fucking oblivious? Did he really forget he has a fucking girlfriend and Johnny's definitely not Ali?

He'll never be Ali.

He feels somewhat bitter about it.

"No," Johnny snaps, trying to tug his hand away from Daniel's, but Daniel's holding on too tight for him to do much. Asshole.

"Then what?" Daniel snaps back, face all scrunched up with rage. "Why fucking can't we? Huh?"

"Because you have a girlfriend!" Johnny growls, finally wrenching his hand free. He's a fucking idiot. Johnny doesn't even know why he likes him so much.

Daniel's eyes widen.

Did he seriously forget?

Daniel sits back on Johnny's legs, just staring at him with that deer-in-headlights look. It's so annoying. Johnny can't believe he likes him so much.

"Fuck," Daniel says softly.

They sit there for a few moments, neither one of them saying anything.

Daniel looks all guilt-ridden and confused, and Johnny can't bring himself to look away from him. He wants Daniel to touch him. He wants to shove Daniel off of him.

"Get off me, man," Johnny mumbles, finally looking away from him.

Daniel does, flopping awkwardly next to him. Johnny can't see his face anymore, just the hunched over line of his back sitting in the sand.

Even with his stupid emotions stirring in his chest, Johnny still wants to reach out and comfort him. He hates that he does, but the heart wants what it wants, huh?

Johnny sighs.

Fuck, he has to say something, doesn't he?

"Ali won't be mad," Johnny says, staring up at the night sky. "Just say you're sorry. Say you were drunk or it was an accident."

"But I'm not," Daniel says quietly. "And it wasn't."

Johnny rolls his eyes. Daniel's too fucking honest for his own good.

"Jesus, man, I'm trying to help y-"

"I'm not," Daniel repeats, firmer this time. He turns his head over his shoulder to look at Johnny, gaze fierce and intense. "And it wasn't."

Johnny can't help the butterflies that fill his stomach.

"Don't say things like that, man," Johnny mumbles, looking away from him. "Ali-"

“Is this really about Ali?” Daniel asks, the question feeling like a punch to the gut. “C’mon, man, are you just scared or something?”

“I’m not scared,” Johnny insists, barely giving Daniel a chance to finish. He doesn’t really believe the words himself though. He sighs, tilting his head towards his chest. “Fuck, man, was it ever about Ali?”

Daniel blinks at him.

“What are you talking about, dude?” Daniel asks, turning his body to face Johnny a little better. “What does that mean?”

Fuck, is he really having this talk again?

“I mean, this,” Johnny says, waving his hands around a little. “Us. The fucking fighting, man. I mean, maybe for you it was, but it wasn’t for me. After a while…it just wasn’t. I guess…I guess I just wanted you to look at me or something.”

Johnny's heart feels like it's going to beat out of his chest. Jeez, he can't believe he said that again. He already knows what Daniel is going to say.

Daniel just looks at him, not saying anything though. Just staring at him.

"I'm looking at you now," Daniel says softly.

Johnny sucks in a sharp breath.

Oh.

Johnny stares at him, feeling the flush that floods his cheeks. Fuck. Fuck, he really is stupidly in love with Daniel.

“Can I kiss you again?” Daniel asks, leaning forward like he already knows the answer. Fucker. He’s lucky Johnny’s so weak for him.

“Yeah,” Johnny breathes out and leans in too.

It’s not their last kiss of the night.

☆

It’s sort of weird after that.

They tell Ali, because Daniel has more guilt than Johnny does and

feels it twice as much. Ali doesn't take it super well or super bad, but she does cast a knowing look at Johnny when they're done telling her. Johnny tries not to squirm under it, but he knows he probably fails.

He and Daniel aren't dating. Not really, anyways.

Sure, he comes over for dinner and they kiss and talk before Mrs. LaRusso calls them to dinner, and then they're right back to kissing and talking. Johnny's fallen asleep in Daniel's bed multiple times.

And yeah, they go to the mall and Golf N' Stuff, and Johnny buys Daniel stuff because he wants to even though Daniel tries to tell Johnny he doesn't have to get him anything, and he gets these butterflies whenever Daniel grins while holding what Johnny bought for him.

It's not dating though. Not that Johnny really cares, because seriously, who gives a shit? He gets to have Daniel and that's enough. It has to be enough.

He tells Bobby about it, because he knows the other guys probably wouldn't take it super well. They glare at Daniel in the hallway and talk shit about him at lunch, so Johnny's sure that casually mentioning it would probably give them an aneurysm.

Bobby wouldn't react like that though since he happens to know not to spit his drink in someone's face when they tell him something unexpected.

(Unlike fucking Dutch, who spit his Coca-Cola in Johnny's face when he told Dutch that Barbara probably likes him back. Bastard.)

He tells him when they're playing video games at Bobby's house since he figures it'll be harder for Bobby to spit something in his face when he's busy trying to complete a level.

Johnny leans back on Bobby's bed, watching the way Bobby's fingers move nimbly across the Nintendo controls. Bobby's stupidly good at these games. He could probably compete in this shit.

Johnny waits until he's done with the level to say anything. Bobby probably doesn't want to mess this level up.

Bobby lifts his thumb to press onto the next level, but Johnny speaks before he gets the chance.

“What would you say if I was making out with Daniel LaRusso?” Johnny blurts. “Like a lot.”

Heat crawls up Johnny’s neck, his cheeks and ears flushing.

The controller falls from Bobby’s hands onto the floor.

Shit, Johnny probably shouldn’t have just sprung that on him. He feels a little bad.

He doesn’t know how Bobby’s going to react, but Bobby’s been notably better about Daniel than the rest of the guys. He actually acknowledges Daniel, nodding at him in the hallway or giving him small waves outside of school.

It’s actually pretty nice to see. It’s nice to see one of his best friends getting along with his…whatever he and Daniel are. Or, well, not getting along but at least not actively disliking Daniel.

Bobby slowly turns around to face Johnny, face carefully neutral. Johnny feels his heart in his throat.

“I’d say cool,” Bobby says slowly. “And ask how it’s going.”

It’s so obviously practiced since it’s the same thing he said to Johnny about Ali, but he sounds more surprised now. Whether because it’s Daniel or because it’s a boy, Johnny has no idea.

He’s just glad Bobby’s being normal about it. Or at least polite.

“It’s good,” Johnny says, shrugging. He feels sweaty. Jesus, is he nervous? Fucking pathetic. “He’s nice.”

Daniel’s more than nice, but it’s hard to describe it out loud.

Daniel talks his ear off, just yapping about anything and everything. He talks about math homework, about his family, about Mr. Miyagi. He talks about the news, about various recipes he thinks Johnny should try, about cars.

And Johnny listens, because it’s surprisingly not annoying when he’s actually kind of in love with Daniel.

Daniel’s also still competitive as shit. He challenges Johnny to so many fucking competitions. He’ll demand Johnny race him, demand Johnny play mini golf with him, demand Johnny play foosball with him.

Johnny loves it. Not that he'll say it out loud, but he can admit he's just as competitive as Daniel. And he likes kicking Daniel's ass, especially in skee ball.

He also does karate with Daniel.

That's been weird since Johnny's no longer kicking ass and taking names with his karate.

He is sparring with Daniel though and it's almost the same every time. Almost. Daniel still surprises him just like Johnny thought he would and it turns out Johnny has some new moves of his own.

Daniel's neighbor, Freddy, sits outside with them sometimes. He talks to Daniel while they spar, which annoys Johnny, but Johnny's more impressed that Daniel actually manages to keep up a conversation while still blocking Johnny's punches.

It's nice to have karate back, even if Johnny's not doing it competitively anymore.

"Just nice?" Bobby asks, drawing Johnny out of his thoughts.

He's giving Johnny a knowing look. Whether it's because he knows it's not just kissing or because he knows that's not the only words Johnny wants to use to describe Daniel, Johnny doesn't know. He should have known better than to try and hide anything from Bobby though. Bobby's like a witch when it comes to these things.

"He's incredible, man," Johnny mumbles, hanging his head. "Just… amazing."

"So you're boyfriends?" Bobby asks, tilting his chin curiously at Johnny.

Johnny laughs humorlessly. "No, not dating, dude. Just like making out and shit."

Bobby narrows his eyes at him. "Are you taking him out?"

"I mean, sometimes? We go to the mall and Golf N' Stuff. And we do karate in his yard, but that's not really a date. And-"

"Wait, wait," Bobby cuts him off. "You do karate? Like with him?"

Johnny shrinks in on himself a little.

He doesn't want to have this conversation again. He's already had it way too many times with the other guys and he refuses to have it with Bobby. He's not going back to Cobra Kai, he already decided that.

"Yeah," Johnny answers, aiming a look at Bobby. *Don't push it* .

Luckily, Bobby just smiles at him and smacks him on the back, practically knocking the wind out of Johnny.

"Good for you, man," Bobby says. "That's great, dude. But, uh, are you sure you're not dating him?"

"Yeah?" Johnny says, scoffing a little. What the hell is Bobby yapping about? Of course they're not dating. If they were dating, then they would have said they were dating. "We don't need to be dating to kiss and shit."

Bobby raises an eyebrow at him.

"Since when do *you* just do shit casually?" Bobby fires back.

"What the hell does that mean?"

Bobby lets out this big sigh, fiddling with a loose string on his jeans.

"You don't just like people, man," Bobby says, not looking at Johnny. His gaze is set on his lap, at the string on his jeans. "You, like, fall in love with them, dude."

Johnny can feel the way his face goes tomato red, digging his fingers into Bobby's blankets.

"No, I don't," Johnny replies hotly, feeling oddly defensive about the whole thing.

"Whatever, man," Bobby scoffs. "You want to know what I think?"

No, he doesn't, but he can't help the way his anger and curiosity get the best of him.

"What?" Johnny snaps.

"I think you're just scared."

Bobby finally locks eyes with him.

Johnny's blood goes cold.

What the fuck is Bobby going on about? He's not fucking scared, especially not of Daniel. What could he possibly be fucking scared of?

What, because he's gotten nightmares about the time loop? He's almost a fucking adult, he can handle it. Or what, because he doesn't know what he's going to fucking mess up with Daniel that'll get him caught in another time loop? He'll be fine. Or-

Okay, whatever, maybe he's fucking scared. Just a little bit.

"Whatever," Johnny mumbles, looking away from Bobby. Bobby's right, who gives a shit? Whoop-dee-fucking-doo.

Johnny feels a hand on his knee, looking up to see the disgustingly soft look Bobby's giving him.

"Hey, man, it's fine if you're scared," Bobby says kindly, almost but not quite smiling at him. "But you have to go after what you want. C'mon, he clearly likes you too, man."

Johnny knows Bobby's right, but still. He can't…he can't live through another time loop because he somehow fucked up confessing to Daniel. He can't do it.

"Bobby, I…" Johnny starts, looking into Bobby's earnest eyes. God, he's always been so weak for Bobby. Still. "I can't."

Bobby frowns.

"Why?"

And Johnny would love to explain the time loop or anything else, but he doesn't want to talk about it right now. He doesn't want Bobby to think of him as weak.

"What if I fuck it up?" Johnny settles on and fuck, he sounds pathetic anyways. "I…fuck, man, it's so stupid. I don't want to ruin it."

"You won't," Bobby says firmly.

"What do you know, man?" Johnny snorts. "I'll probably just-"

"You're not going to fuck it up," Bobby says, not even letting him finish. "You can't run away because you're scared, Johnny. What happened to striking first?"

Johnny levels a glare at Bobby. "I'm not in Cobra Kai. I don't actually

have to listen to what Kreese says anymore."

Bobby doesn't look away from him though, gaze remaining steadfast on Johnny.

"C'mon, man, give it a chance," Bobby says, eyes growing kind. "For me?"

Jesus, he's always been stupidly weak for Bobby. Especially Bobby's eyes.

And he actually happens to like Bobby, so doing things for him isn't actually a hardship and saying no to him is practically impossible for Johnny.

The problem is he's just so fucking scared. Terrified if what could happen if he fucks it up.

Maybe that makes him a pussy, but he can't bring himself to care.

"C'mon, man," Bobby says softly.

Fuck, he's so fucking weak.

"Fine," Johnny sighs out. "Fuck– fine."

Bobby smiles at him.

“Thank you,” he says softly. “You want to try and beat the next level, dude?”

Johnny sighs.

“Yeah, fuck it, why not?”

☆

Johnny doesn't actually talk to Daniel immediately. Or even after a week. Or a month. Or two months.

(Yes, he did get Daniel something for Valentine’s Day, because he’s stupidly fucking soft for him. He gets him chocolates and a black leather bracelet. He’d probably buy a whole new car for Daniel if he asked him to.

Daniel also got him something, because he’s sweet. He got Johnny a little stuffed teddy bear and made Johnny a mixtape. Johnny damn

near cried.)

In fact, it isn't until around mid-April that Johnny actually gets any sort of courage to talk to Daniel about it.

He's spent the past few months admittedly waiting for the other shoe to drop. Waiting to be thrust back into a time loop. Waiting for some part of the universe to tell him he wasn't meant to have this, to have Daniel.

It hasn't come, but Johnny can't help but admit he's sort of waiting for it to happen. But he's sick of the looks that Bobby keeps giving him, like he's aware of the fact that Johnny hasn't confessed. Like he somehow knows something Johnny doesn't. It's annoying.

It is, however, the thing that drives Johnny to come up with a half-formed confession plan.

He buys Daniel flowers before he drives over, because it worked out pretty well the last time he asked someone out. That and Daniel deserves something nice. Something he can put on his shelf or maybe a table.

He hides the flowers behind his back before he knocks on Daniel's door, feeling the way his hands get all clammy. His heart feels all fluttery, nervous in a way that's not truly bad. Like he feels at the top of a roller coaster.

Daniel opens the door, all smiles. He always smiles when he sees Johnny now. It makes butterflies erupt in Johnny's stomach, practically slamming into his ribcage with how strong they are.

"Hey," Daniel says, tilting his head up at Johnny.

"Hey," Johnny replies, leaning down for a kiss without even thinking about it. It's become a habit at this point. He presses his lips to Daniel's for a few quick seconds before pulling away, watching the way Daniel grins all softly.

Johnny takes a second to admire him.

Daniel's beautiful. Big brown eyes and tan skin, soft brown hair that Johnny gets to run his fingers through and Daniel lets him. Johnny feels so incredibly lucky as stupid as it sounds.

"Gonna stand there looking pretty or you gonna come in?" Daniel

says, grin turning teasing in a matter of seconds. He's so incredibly annoying and Johnny loves it.

"Still deciding," Johnny replies, because he's also annoying and he's not afraid to show it. "Had something to give you first."

He takes the bouquet of flowers from behind his back and pushes it into Daniel's chest, trying not to look too embarrassed about it. He's sure he's failing.

Daniel brings his hands up to hold the flowers, eyes lighting up. He looks from the bouquet to Johnny and back to the bouquet, a silly grin forming on his lips.

"Thanks, Johnny," he says softly, holding the flowers close to his chest.

Johnny nods a little, following Daniel into the apartment. Daniel takes the flowers into his bedroom, setting them gently on his nightstand. The tender treatment makes Johnny's heart melt.

It's a weird thing for his heart to get all gooey over, but maybe it's just because of how much Johnny likes Daniel. Loves him.

Johnny clenches his fist.

Right, that's what he needs to tell him.

Daniel turns around to face him, sitting on his bed. He brings his legs into a criss-cross position, looking ready to launch into a rant about something.

And normally, Johnny would listen. Johnny would sit down next to him and let Daniel talk his ear off. He peppers in Johnny's name throughout it, always a drawn out *Jaaahnny* that makes Johnny's heart flutter.

"The other day-" Daniel starts, but Johnny cuts him off.

"Daniel," he blurts out, tugging at the edge of his jacket. Fuck, he has to say this. He has to say this now or he's not going to be able to.

He just ends up staring at Daniel though.

Daniel raises an eyebrow, waiting him out. He's so damn patient with Johnny.

“Yeah?” Daniel says after a little bit, tone encouraging. “What’s wrong, Johnny? Are you sick or something?”

Johnny almost groans out loud.

Fuck. Fuck, he just has to do it. Just has to get it over with.

“I like you,” Johnny says in a rush. Fuck, no, that’s not right. “Love you. Fuck, I love you.”

Daniel stares up at him, eyes wide. His cheeks are red, his mouth hanging open.

Fuck, Johnny ruined it, didn’t he?

Fuck. Fuck, he’s so fucking stupid.

He presses the heel of his hands to his eyes, feeling that familiar panic in his chest. Fuck. He’s so fucking pathetic and stupid and-

“Johnny,” Daniel murmurs softly. “Johnny, hey, sit down. You’re okay, it’s okay.”

He feels a hand at his elbow, gently guiding him to sit down on the bed. It helps a little bit, if only because he no longer feels like his legs are going to collapse underneath him.

Daniel’s hand rubs at his back gently, rubbing soothing circles into the tense muscle.

God, Daniel’s way too fucking nice to him. He’s so nice and Johnny doesn’t deserve it.

They sit there for a bit, Daniel quietly rubbing Johnny’s back while Johnny keeps his face firmly in his hands. He doesn’t want Daniel to see him right now.

“Hey,” Daniel says quietly after a moment. “Hey, you know I love you too, right?”

Johnny immediately shoots up, turning to face Daniel with wide eyes.

What?

“What?” Johnny voices aloud.

Daniel’s not looking at him, staring at his lap with furrowed brows. He

twists the edge of his shirt in his lap, the other hand twisting in his sheets after Johnny had knocked it off his back by accident.

“Yeah?” Daniel says, biting his lower lip. “I mean, we only make out in my bedroom, what? Every other day? Thought you knew, man.”

“I mean love as in I want to date you, LaRusso,” Johnny says, hoping saying it will help get the point across. “Like I want to be your boyfriend.”

Daniel looks up at him, tilting his head.

“I thought we were dating?” he says.

A record scratch sounds in Johnny’s brain.

What? Daniel thought they were dating already? Why? How?

“Why?” Johnny asks, genuinely confused.

They’d never said they were dating.

Daniel scratches the back of his neck awkwardly.

“Gee, I don’t know,” he replies sarcastically. “Maybe the flowers you got me today? Or the fact we spent Valentine’s Day together? Or the fact you got me a heart-shaped box full of chocolate or the fact we go on dates and shit? We’ve made out a shit ton, man.”

He looks fired up but also incredibly embarrassed, seeming like he’s fighting to not look away from Johnny right now.

Johnny feels dumbstruck.

Oh.

Shit, maybe they were dating. Is that why Bobby looked at him like that when he told him about this? That…yeah, that would check out.

“I mean, unless you didn’t mean it like that,” Daniel murmurs, twisting his shirt to the left and then right. “But…fuck, man, I can’t do casual. I can’t…I can’t keep doing this if you want to keep it casual.”

Fuck, Johnny’s been such an idiot.

He scrambles for something, anything he can do before he finally settles on gently unwinding Daniel’s hand from his shirt. He tangles

their fingers together, holding him gently.

He's really trying his best not to be too embarrassed about how gentle he is with Daniel. About how he'll probably continue to be gentle with him until they're throwing each other around in the grass later.

"I don't want to do casual either," Johnny responds. "Just didn't know if you'd want that."

"You're such a fucking idiot," Daniel says, but it's not unkind. Mostly fond if not a little exasperated. "Jesus, of course I want that, dumbass."

"So, if I asked you to go out with me…?"

"I'd say yes. Fucking obviously."

And with that, Daniel surges in for a kiss, bringing his free hand up to cup Johnny's face.

That night, Johnny sleeps over at Daniel's. Mostly because it's what they always do but partially because Johnny's scared. He knows it's fucking stupid to be, but he is.

Scared he did it wrong. Scared he's going to wake up and it's going to be four months ago. Scared he's not going to be able to have this anymore.

He stays awake for a while, Daniel laying on the center of his chest while Johnny runs his fingers through his hair. He falls asleep eventually, more out of exhaustion than anything else.

He wakes in the morning with Daniel still on top of him like a fucking koala and almost cries.

He's too fucking warm and the sun is shining directly in his eyes, but he's so fucking happy.

He gets to have this. He gets to have Daniel as his boyfriend and he gets to do karate with Daniel.

He couldn't imagine anything better.

Not that he's going to tell Daniel that. Little bastard is cocky enough.

Johnny is going to make him breakfast though. And kick his ass later. He knows Daniel will know what it means, because he's sappy like

that.

☆

Johnny does ask Daniel to prom at the very last minute.

It's okay though, because Daniel says yes and ribs him for being late to the party about everything. Which, haha, very funny.

Johnny spends most of the night splitting his time between Daniel and the guys before Daniel decides he's going to start randomly talking Tommy's ear off about something. It's not really a disaster.

Sure, the guys are annoyed but also deeply entertained. And Daniel knows stuff about cars, which gets all of them talking.

Johnny also sees Ali slow dancing with Susan at the end of the night and he can't help but grin. Good for them.

Johnny drives Daniel home at the end of the night, letting Daniel pick the music. Even if it means they end up listening to Cyndi Lauper's Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, because Daniel's a little bastard.

Johnny parks outside of the complex, meeting Daniel halfway for a goodbye kiss.

"Y'know," Daniel murmurs as he pulls away. "I never did get a slow dance."

Johnny does feel a little bad about that. He knows Daniel gets it, the fact that he didn't want anybody except Bobby to know, but it doesn't mean it's not eating him up inside a little.

"We're not slow dancing to Cyndi Lauper," Johnny says, already knowing what he wants.

"Can't slow dance to Black Sabbath," Daniel shoots back with a shit-eating grin on his face. Which, fuck him, they totally could if they tried.

Daniel switches the radio stations over and over, smirk growing wider and wider as he flips from one station to another. Oh, he's totally fucking with Johnny.

Johnny's ready to shove his Black Sabbath cassette in the deck when Daniel settles on some slow country song.

He's still got a shit-eating grin, because he's an asshole and Johnny unfortunately likes that about him. Johnny rolls his eyes at him, reaching out to turn it up enough so that they can hear it outside the car.

Johnny wraps his arms loosely around Daniel's neck, Daniel's arms a bit tighter around his waist as they sway to the music.

Johnny's glad he gets to keep this. That it's his.

It's perfect.

It's his for his long as he'll have it. And he has no intention of letting it go anytime soon.

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!! I had so much fun writing this and I had so much fun writing Johnny's character and how he changes throughout. They're so much fun to write and they always complicate stuff for themselves <3

I was thinking the song they slow dance to at the end is We've Got Tonight by Kenny Rogers and Sheena Easton, because it is just so them.

I was thinking about writing a sequel or maybe writing some more alisusan because I love their dynamic! Let me know your thoughts if you want and have a nice day!!

My tumblr is transjlawrence

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!